CLINICAL RECORDS.

Report of a Case of Injury to the Nervous Centres, caused by a fall from a vehicle in motion. Communicated by S. M. MACSWINEY, M.D., F.K.Q.C.P.

IN the number of *The Dublin Journal* for December, 1878, there appeared the history of a case of "Railway Spine," which terminated fatally, and which was communicated by me to the Medical Society. Some weeks after the publication of this case, I received a letter from a medical gentleman, of which the following is a short extract:—"A few days ago I saw a short notice of a paper which you had read before the King and Queen's College of Physicians, on Nervous Lesion from Shock. Thinking you would like to hear of some more of these cases than you have yourself witnessed, I take the liberty of sending you a report of one which is, unhappily, but too well known to me—I myself being the sufferer." Accompanying the private letter was the following case, which I give without note or comment—feeling satisfied that everyone interested in the history and progress of nervous lesions will find, in the minute and graphic delineation of the features of the case supplied by the writer, ample materials for forming an opinion upon the essential nature of the affection from which he has suffered so much.

CASE.—Jan. 1, 1878, on returning from visiting a patient some miles off, the night being very dark, my horse took fright, bolted, and flung me out of a sulky, or light gig, to the dry bottom of a ditch, the ground being rough and frozen very hard. I fell flat on my back. I felt little or no pain in my back, but two days after I became weak, and on coughing or sneezing felt a most excruciating pain, rather deep-seated, behind the fifth and sixth interspace on the left of the sternum. This continued, more or less, for, I think, about a fortnight, when it nearly all went away. Occasionally I have felt it since, particularly when lying on the right side.

During January I grew weaker; legs seemed to fail; palpitation came on when I exerted myself. Wrote to a medical friend on the subject. He thought the trouble was a feeble heart, and that I had been weakening myself by taking anthelmintics to remove a tænia with which I had been troubled. He prescribed iron and digitalis, I believe. The digitalis I found I could not bear, even in small doses. It affected the nervous system fearfully, so that I could scarcely steady my hand to write. I continued to get weaker for a few weeks, and once had to lie down when visiting a patient, I felt so much prostrated. About March 23rd, I was obliged to give up and take to my bed. My sensations were—a feeling

as if the ears were plugged; a sense of congestion about the medulla oblongata; a quivering or dizziness frequently occurring, and scarcely describable, apparently in the cerebellum and posterior portion of cerebrum, as if a fit of some kind were impending; once or twice a sudden acute musical sound in the ears, then a buzzing, chiefly in the left ear, which, varied in sound, continues still. This tinnitus sometimes was, and is now, like water flowing at a distance; sometimes like the noise of a boiling kettle; sometimes like frying meat; sometimes like a fife. Appetite tolerably fair; exhaustion tremendous. Had to keep the horizontal position. On sitting up for a little I got faint, sometimes so much so as to be almost sure I was dying. Got scarcely any sleep; when I dozed a little, horrible dreams and sensations like nightmare suddenly awoke me. Pulse weak, tolerably slow and regular. Great venous congestion in hands, arms, and feet, probably from impaired power of circulation. The doctor kindly visited me. He still regarded the heart as the cause of my illness. Though a skilful man he did not appear to suspect the real cause of the suffering, but rallied me; told me to get up out of bed; to eat plenty of red meats, use stimulants—and, indeed, talked to me as if I were a hypochondriac. I asked him did he not think that I was suffering from a lesion of innervation. He assented to this in such a manner as if he did so to please me. I was ordered a syrup of triple phosphates—iron, quinine, and strychnine were the active ingredients. One or two doses was all I durst take. The strychnine played havoc with me, and made my head far worse.

Gradually the attacks of prostration and faintness wore away, but I suffered fearfully from my head. When able to be out of bed a few hours in the day I used to go to the pump and place my head under the stream. Sometimes I would get pails of water, intensely cold, poured on my head to relieve the vertigo and pain.

Matters continued thus till about the end of April, when I suddenly felt a slight pain in the sacrum. This got worse in a day or two, and I had to dry-cup myself. I felt a little better, and having business as a witness at the county assizes in a murder case, I ventured to go to court. Whilst there I suffered a good deal with my back. I should not have ventured out had I not thought I was suffering from lumbago, several attacks of which I had had previous to this illness. On my return I fomented my back with very hot water, and felt much relieved next morning. But in about ten days from the inception of this attack in the loins I was seized with a pain of a very intense kind, on the right side of the spine, near the last of the dorsal vertebræ. I again dry-cupped myself, and had several times to use hypodermic injections to assuage the suffering. The pain passed down the course of the anterior crural nerve through the iliac region to the thigh. Spasmodic action of the femoral muscles followed, and then a paralysed condition of them. When

I attempted to walk the right limb could not support my weight. I ought to have mentioned that when the head symptoms commenced, fibrillary tremors in different parts of the body followed, and these have continued ever since. The muscles of the right thigh became a little stronger, so that I could go up and down stairs, but the pulse got quicker, pain continued in the back, then atrocious pains came into the hips and legs—afterwards into the hands and arms.

In June I consulted two eminent specialists. One of them pronounced the case one of *locomotor ataxia*, and prescribed ergot (which I had been taking) and bromide of sodium. I had previously blistered, cupped, leeches, and used strong purgatives, but did not begin soon enough, in consequence of the feelings of prostration and the dictum of my medical attendant as to the diagnosis and treatment. The other physician, seeing that I could stand with my feet close together, and my eyes closed, and walk straight without losing my sight, denied this, and said he thought the trouble was in the meninges. He prescribed salicylate of soda. I did not take much of this, but persevered with the fluid extract of ergot for a month and more. I had to substitute potass. iod. for the sodii bromid., in consequence of an eruption coming out on my face. When the femoral muscles were paralysed I experienced almost complete anæsthesia on the front of the right leg, from knee to ankle. I blistered the surface with considerable benefit. Afterwards there was hyperæsthesia in right knee. By advice of a physician I used dry-cupping over the spine daily, for about a month. I have been repeatedly blistered, and have had blood drawn from the region of the spine. Last November I went to a watering place where there are sulphur springs. I drank the waters and had baths, but with the effect of making me weaker. The “pack” alone seemed to benefit me; the lumbar pain appeared to be alleviated by it. I took, under medical advice, the steam bath, the Turkish bath, the electro-chemical bath, &c., but had, at last, to protest against them. One of the specialists in neurotic diseases ordered me the induced current—to be used frequently—but electricity did not seem to suit; probably there was too much congestion, and the lesion was too recent. It seemed to make my head worse. In the earlier part of my illness I had perineal pains, and a little irritation of the bladder; these went away after a time almost entirely, but large quantities of urine—for the most part light-coloured and clear—were passed; bowels rather constipated; have had to keep in bed for months. The present symptoms, nearly thirteen months after the accident, are:—Pulse, when I am quiet and in recumbent position, 80—compressible, regular; when I get out of bed, or use exertion, 120; occasional prostration, with fluttering of heart—this almost always occurs when awaking from sleep, perhaps partly from mental anguish and disappointment, on awaking and realising my condition; tendency to

melancholy; appetite fair; pains not so bad as formerly; muscles of thigh stronger; can walk pretty well, though feet feel numb at starting; soreness and occasional pain in knee-joints; abundant pale urine; muscles generally flaccid; fibrillary tremors continue, but not so bad as formerly—the most annoying are around and in the ears; neuralgic pains often shoot into various parts of the face—sometimes to ends of toes and fingers. Formerly there appeared to be a deficiency of synovial fluid, particularly in maxillary and cervical articulations, producing cringing and cracking noises; there appears now to be a better supply. Headache and vertigo not so bad; tinnitus continues; dry mouth and thirst at night. Always confined to bed, (1) because the back and limbs seem easier in the horizontal position; (2) because the glutei muscles being wasted it hurts me greatly to sit, the os coccygis not being kept up from the seat by the cushion of muscle; (3) because I have lost energy to do any work, and I seem to bear solitude and idleness better in bed. I still suffer from want of sleep; the trouble of mind and the want of exercise will account, in some measure, for this. If I lie on my side the foot which is undermost will sometimes become partially numb. If I lie on my back the ring and little fingers become numb from the slight pressure on the ulnar nerves at the elbow. Among the pains which I formerly felt were some of a burning character, and apparently in the integuments; these have nearly quite disappeared. Standing long, or walking much, causes more after-suffering. I am taking no medicine, and eating moderately. I have in former years been, in the autumn, subject to bronchitic asthma, and since this illness came on I seem to be more susceptible of these attacks, whenever I catch cold.

Remarks.—On reviewing my case I am inclined to think that there was concussion, if not contusion, of a portion of the nervous centres, which finally induced inflammatory action. Had I been near to an experienced physician he might have detected this while in the stage of meningitis; and, probably, had it been combated by purgatives, local blood-letting, blistering, calomel and opium, &c., it might never have advanced to the point it did. When the violent pain came on, about the tenth day, hyperæmia, probably, had so far advanced that sanguineous effusion took place; if not, perhaps, the effusion was serous from inflammatory action. Unfortunately, I was in an isolated position and had to do almost every thing for myself—illness, no doubt, obscuring the judgment, and absence of hope causing apathy and carelessness. The value of the services of an experienced brother *medico*, who will *con amore* stand by us when we are ill, is very great.

I may add that I was in tolerably good health when I received the injury, only run down a little by hard work. I have lived a temperate life and am of robust *physique*, or rather was so before the muscular system suffered, and something beyond middle age.