

addressed to Crito, to sacrifice a cock to Esculapius, were the effect of delirium, because it is well known that he suffered death for having opposed these superstitious observances.—*Jour. Comp. des Sci. Med.*

AMPUTATION OF THE ASTRAGALUS.

Case of Dislocation and Extraction of the Astragalus. By WILLIAM A. GILLESPIE, of Ellisville, Virginia.

[Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

ON the evening of the 23d of March last, I was called to a Mrs. A., a corpulent lady aged about 50, who had fallen from a horse and dislocated both ankle joints. The luxation of the right foot was accompanied by that of the astragalus, which projected through a wound of the integuments of the external ankle. This wound extended from the instep to the tendo Achilles, nearly as straight and smooth as if it had been inflicted by the knife. The severity of the injury induced me to seek consultation immediately, which I readily obtained. Our united opinion was to attempt to save the limb by removing the astragalus, and combating such symptoms as should arise. This bone was already partly without the joint, and confined to it by only a few fibres of ligament, its connections generally being ruptured, and its trochlea occupying about an angle of 45° from its natural position; consequently it could only have remained as foreign matter within the joint, without a possibility of regaining any permanent connection with it. The wound of the integuments was sufficiently large to admit of its removal without much pain or difficulty, by passing a bistoury in such direction as to separate its little remaining connections. This operation was performed early on the next day. The integuments were now approximated—three stitches, adhesive strips, and light dressings, applied. I must here observe that the pain at the time of the occurrence of the accident, and for several days afterwards, was so excruciating as to require the liberal administration of laudanum.

On the third day she complained of stiffness of the lower jaw, and difficulty of deglutition, which induced me to fear the occurrence of tetanus. Laudanum was now more freely administered, and these symptoms yielded within 24 hours. Nothing remarkable took place until April 1st, when a decided disposition to gangrene occurred. The fermenting poultice, prepared of bran, coarse flour, molasses, yeast and water, was now applied, and kept sufficiently warm to ferment by hot bricks placed on each side of the foot. In 24 hours there was most decided and great improvement in the appearance of the wound; the swelling mostly disappeared, together with the livid color and dark spots previously on the lower part of the leg; the cuticle separated, and an abscess formed on the inner ankle, which discharged a large quantity of pus. Poultices were continued for several days, mixed with a decoction of red-oak bark. On the 3d of April hectic fever supervened, attended by exhausting night sweats. Bark, wine, and the diluted sulphuric acid, were now prescribed; the hectic soon began to yield, and by the 14th of April had entirely disappeared.

I must not here omit to mention that the leg piece of Professor N. R.

Smith's apparatus for fractures of the os femoris, which is described in his 'Medical and Surgical Memoirs,' published in 1831, was early applied, and the leg suspended, which added evidently much to her comfort, and I am clearly of opinion accelerated the cure. I had seen several fractures treated in the same way with great success. On the 19th of April she had an attack of bilious pneumonia, which yielded to the ordinary remedies; but notwithstanding this, the wound healed rapidly and progressively from about the 10th of April to the 23d of May, when it was entirely healed; the cure thus occupying only two months—a much shorter time than I had anticipated, and less, I believe, than that of any case on record. She cannot yet walk, but I feel confident she will be able to do so after a reasonable time. Owing to the severity of the injury, the excessive pain from the least motion of the injured parts, and her great weight, she was at first directed to remain in the most easy posture, which was on her back, and not to be moved; consequently she passed her urine and fæces in bed, which, from the difficulty of keeping the parts clean, produced considerable excoriation. I therefore constructed an apparatus (which I have not space here to describe) for raising her gently, and without the least pain, from the bed, so that a vessel could be placed under her to receive the excrements. Her situation was rendered as agreeable, perhaps, as the nature of the case would admit, which is a great point, in my estimation, in the treatment of both medical and surgical diseases. Nothing that can render the patient's confinement more comfortable, whether in mind or body, should ever be withheld, unless it be of a very injurious tendency in some respects.

The above is a statement of facts, from which, I think, some hints may be taken, or rather the testimony of the success of others strengthened. There are, I believe, but few cases on record similar to the present one, but enough to demonstrate the propriety of removing the astragalus in preference to amputation, which was formerly the established practice in such cases. Whilst modern Surgery has achieved many feats of almost incredible success in the use of the knife, I confidently believe that this science, in its present rapid march of improvement, aided by experience, will clearly reveal the practicability of saving many useful limbs, which are now sacrificed, some of them, perhaps, at the shrine of ambition thirsting for ill-earned fame, by numbering heaps of amputated limbs!

The excellent effect of the fermenting poultice, in this case, is worthy of recollection. It was prepared in such a way as to be *truly a fermenting poultice*; and its action appeared to be strongly antiseptic, whilst it destroyed the intolerable fetor of the discharges.

Another remark, with respect to the use of laudanum when we have any apprehension of the occurrence of tetanus. I am of opinion that after all severe accidents or operations attended by much sensibility and pain, it is most proper to begin its administration early, and to keep the system under its sedative influence by sufficient and repeated doses. I have little doubt, that but for the administration of this potent drug, I should have had to contend with that very formidable disease.

July, 1833.