NOTES OF A CASE OF DROWNING.¹

BY GEORGE STEDMAN, M. D.

ON Thursday, May 22, 1884, the body of an unknown man was found off Wellington's wharf in the water of the Mystic river. The body was that of a man five feet ten inches in height and about one hundred and seventy pounds in weight. He was about forty-four years of age, had heavy red mustache and side whiskers ("Galway sides"). He wore a dark mixed suit, white shirt, and heavy boots; this being all the information known to the medical examiner.

External examination showed no mark of violence except a bruise upon the forehead. There was no frothy foam perceptible at the external air passage, neither was there any strongly marked congestion of the face or upper part of the body, and the body was in an excellent state of preservation. Forty-eight hours after the recovery of the body there was noticed a bluish-purple discoloration of the eyelids; and upon the lower portion of the abdomen, in the iliac region of each side, there was at the expiration of another day a greenish discoloration, somewhat faint, of the size and shape of half a pea-pod.

Though from the place of finding the body, death was presumably from immersion, the fact of a decomposition developing at the abdomen primarily, and the discoloration about the eyes, which in the absence of any other appearance of decomposition about the face and head, taken in connection with the bruises on the forehead, suggested that there might be a fracture at the base of the skull, and an autopsy was decided upon.

At the time of examination, which was four days and a half after the recovery of the body, the appearances which have been mentioned had not materially changed, except that the discoloration about the eyes appeared more like the discoloration of decomposition than like the ecchymosis of a fracture.

On section there was found to be very little if any congestion of the vessels of the brain.

The right heart was in no way distended with blood, and a portion of the blood in the right auricle was clotted.

The lungs were not increased in volume, and only moderately congested, neither did the section show the presence of water in these organs to anything beyond an amount which might have been readily overlooked.

The stomach contained about a teacupful of water. The other internal organs, aside from a very slight amount of congestion, presented nothing unusual.

While all these appearances are consistent with each other, and consistent with death from drowning, which in the absence of any other cause of death discovered post-mortem, and in view of the history of the case, is undoubtedly the correct diagnosis, the case is of interest from the absence of almost all the typical signs of death from drowning, and by the presence of some of the appearances which are supposed to contraindicate such cause of death.

The probability is that the man fell into the water, and in falling struck his forehead, producing insensibility, that he immediately sank, and being insensible he made no attempt at inspiration, thereby getting no water into the lungs. The fact that there was no

struggling would account for the absence of the intense congestion generally seen in the upper parts of the body. Hence the developing of the process of decomposition in the usual manner.

CHLORAL HYDRATE AS AN ANTISEPTIC.

BY E. WARNER, M. D., OF WORCESTER, MASS.

For the last ten years I have used a solution of chloral hydrate as almost my only surgical dressing. This has met the conditions so perfectly, I have not been tempted to substitute for it any of the other dressings that have met with favor among those making use of antiseptic treatment.

It makes a clear and clean solution, itself without offensive odor, and with power to remove the odor of carbolic acid or the fœtor of purulent discharge.

It is not only not irritating, but it seems to act as a local sedative or narcotic, often relieving the pain of a recent injury or operation so completely as to make the use of an opiate unnecessary.

It leaves no stain; can be sprinkled freely on the floor as on the clothing, and its use is no way disagreeable. It is inexpensive and simple in its application.

A solution of the strength of from three to five grains to the ounce will be found sufficient for all ordinary purposes.

In the treatment of large suppurating wounds or granulating surfaces, it will often keep the air of the room or ward so pure that no one would suspect the presence of such a case. There is no danger from its absorption, but much comfort follows its constant employment. The spray is not used during the operation, and no heavy, thick, and somewhat bungling dressing afterward. A light and moist dressing is all that is required. After properly cleansing the wound with this solution, adjust by suture or strap the flaps or edges of the wound as accurately as possible. Make use of a light compress moistened with the solution, and apply the roller with only sufficient firmness to keep the parts from bagging or the flaps from becoming œdematous and flabby. If necessary leave some dependent point open for drainage, and use no drainage tube unless its use seems imperatively demanded. The presence of the drainage tube usually prevents union by first intention.

This warm, moist, light, and clean dressing will prove soothing and agreeable to the patient, and can easily be changed as often as is required for cleanliness, as the dressing is not allowed to become dry and sticky. Somewhat frequent changes add to the comfort of the patient and insure perfect cleanliness. This tends also to relieve the surgeon of anxiety, and he watches less nervously the pulse and temperature to apprise him of the approach of threatened danger, as is the case when the wound is concealed under the numerous folds of the Lister dressing.

There need be no fear of bacteria entering the exposed wound. They are effectually destroyed by the dressing; the soil becomes unsuited to their development and growth. It acts as a perfect germicide, and this is why the spray is discarded, which is an unpleasant and troublesome part of Listerism.

For use during the operation a solution made with warm water is preferred. In this the hands of the operator are cleansed, the sponges, instruments, liga-

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