

ESSEX AND COLCHESTER HOSPITAL.

OPERATION FOR STONE IN THE BLADDER.

By ROGER S. NUNN, Surgeon to the Essex and Colchester Hospital.

ON Friday, the 12th instant, I operated upon Thos. H—, aged fifty-two, the subject of stone in the bladder, in the presence of most of the medical gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood. The ether was exhibited by my colleague, Dr. Williams, who considered the patient to be sufficiently under its influence after he had inhaled it seven or eight minutes, at the end of which time I commenced the operation. There was neither difficulty nor loss of time in cutting into the bladder; but having done so, some little delay occurred in grasping the stone, which was small, very flat, and lying in the posterior part of the bladder. The delay was also increased by the extremely relaxed state of the bladder itself, which seemed to fall in folds on the forceps, and to cover the stone. The time occupied, from the commencement of the operation to the period when the man was unbound, was ten minutes, during which the ether was administered at intervals. The patient was placed fully under its influence, and the breathing first became heavy, and ultimately stertorous. He recovered, however, from its effects after a short time, and continued in a quiet, passive state, but without decided reaction, for twenty-four hours. At this period he had a severe chill, which lasted for nearly twenty minutes. Mr. Taylor (the house-surgeon) immediately gave him two ounces of brandy, with an equal quantity of water, after which the patient remained in a dozing state till eight o'clock P.M., when the house-surgeon considered it necessary to send for me, as a state of complete prostration or collapse had ensued. I ordered small quantities of brandy-and-water, (equal parts,) with arrow-root at intervals, wrapped him in hot blankets, placed bottles of hot water in the bed, &c. This treatment was kept up till nine o'clock the following morning, when ammonia was given alternately with the aforementioned stimulus. The patient seemed incoherent from eight o'clock P.M. of Saturday, till nine A.M. of the following day, when symptoms of slight reaction appeared. At a consultation of the medical staff, which was held at the time, it was determined that the same treatment should be continued, (modified according to circumstances,) and that, in addition, a stimulating injection should be administered. (The effect of the injection was to increase slightly the frequency of the heart's pulsation, but without exciting his nervous energies.) From this period he gradually sank, and died at five o'clock P.M., being sensible to the last. I should here mention, that the small vessels, which are necessarily divided in making the first incision, showed much inclination to bleed, owing, I imagine, to their want of contractile power. I therefore, to prevent any unnecessary hæmorrhage, secured them immediately after the patient was put to bed, so that he did not lose much blood.

Post-mortem examination, sixty-seven hours after death.—Membranous congestion of the brain, but no effusion; brain firm; lungs permeable throughout, anteriorly exsanguineous, posteriorly engorged. Heart flaccid, of a natural size, and nearly empty. The left kidney pale, the right slightly congested. The bladder and the adjoining parts presented the usual aspect after an operation.

I would mention, that the blood throughout the whole vascular system was in a perfectly fluid state.

It is not my intention or inclination to attribute the loss of my patient wholly to the influence of the ether which was administered in this case, nor hastily to decry its use under all circumstances connected with surgical operations; but, still I feel called upon to bring before the notice of my medical brethren, the effects which resulted from its exhibition in this instance, that the profession may judge, from the recital of an unsuccessful case, how far it may be considered safe to employ ether generally, as a means of preventing the pain otherwise inseparable from physical lesion. The suffused eye, livid lips, and stertorous breathing, accompanied first by convulsive struggles, and next by a sudden cessation of all motion, are often indications of the effects of the vapour, and these were not altogether absent in the present instance. Still I felt myself justified in employing it, from the published accounts of many successful cases, and the sanction of my colleagues and numerous friends around me. In prosecuting the operation there was nothing peculiar to attract my attention, or to lead me to consider the patient's physical condition differed from that of those on whom I had before operated, until I had reached the bladder, when I can but attribute the difficulty in seizing the stone to the appa-

rently collapsed state of that viscus, which had fallen in folds over the calculus, and so prevented its being grasped by the forceps. I must not, however, omit to mention the fact, that the patient expressed no signs of suffering during the operation. Thus far, therefore, it may be said the ether fulfilled its intended offices. But I think another question is involved—viz., whether the artificial means thus employed may not produce very serious depressing effects on the nervous system, depriving a patient of that reactive power so necessary to the reparative process? Has not a patient after the administration of ether a double shock to overcome—that produced by the vapour superadded to that of the operation itself? Does not the history of the post-mortem examination bear out the suspicion of the depressing influence of this inhalation? positively, from the still fluid state of the blood (although the body was not opened for sixty-seven hours after death) and the flaccid state of the heart; negatively, from the fact that the inspection detected no indications of violence done to the parts that could explain the rapid dissolution which ensued, and that there was no evidence of Nature having made the slightest effort towards local reparation. Pain is doubtless our great safeguard under ordinary circumstances; but for it we should hourly be running into danger; and I am inclined to believe that pain should be considered as a healthy indication, and an essential concomitant with surgical operations, and that it is amply compensated for by the effects it produces on the system as the natural incentive to reparative action. I trust that the publication of this unsuccessful case may lead to the publicity of many others which have occurred, so that the profession may not be led away by the erroneous supposition that the prevention of pain is so vital a desideratum in operative surgery.

OPERATIONS ON AN INFANT AND AN ADULT, UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ETHER.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I beg to forward two cases of operations performed under the influence of ether, one of which is most interesting, as being the only case recorded in England, of an infant only ten months old, being subjected to the influence of ether, for operation, with the exception of one case named in the last LANCET, the particulars of which are not fully given.

Feb. 27th.—J— L—, aged about forty-five, residing in King-street, has suffered from three painful hæmorrhoidal excrescences, which unfit him for work, and for which the usual remedies have been essayed in vain. He wished their removal, and was fully influenced by the vapour, in about two minutes, from an instrument constructed by myself, with a calibre of three-eighths of an inch in diameter, throughout tube and mouth-piece—the recipient of the ether being a common glass receiver, into the small orifice of which one end of the tube was adapted, and through a cock in the large aperture, a glass tube let down nearly to the bottom. In the use of this instrument I was kindly assisted by Dr. Wright and Mr. Fisher, Chemist. The three tumours were successively seized with the tenaculum, and cut away slowly by a scalpel. The mouth-piece being now removed, and the patient questioned whether he was now ready, or would like to postpone the operation a day or two, replied, he thought he would postpone it, but when informed that it was already completed, he expressed much surprise and delight. I asked, had he a dream? he said, "Nothing, Sir, except that I fancied I heard you cutting a thread with scissors."

The second and most interesting case was that of the infant of Mr. Savory, Chemist, High-street. I performed the operation at his private residence, in Jersey-place. This infant, only ten months old, had a subcutaneous nævus, the elevated and discoloured part of which was about the size of a sixpence on the left temple, and was growing rapidly. I had advised extirpation by ligature. The child in about two minutes got under the full influence of the ether, (by inhaling it from lint and sponge, previously wrung out of hot water,) it closed its eyes, and fell as it were into a calm and sweet sleep.

From the shape of the tumour, I was obliged to pass three needles under its base, which I afterwards included in a strong twisted silk ligature, drawing the noose with the full force necessary to strangle the tumour. The infant never moved during the transfixion or tightening the thread. The ends of the needles were snipped off with cutting pliers, and otherwise secured from disturbance. The vapour which had been kept applied gently and skilfully during the whole period, by Dr. Thomas Wright, of this town, was now removed