

it and the walls of the umbilicus a small, circular interval, free all round, split on one side, and gave issue to two peculiar bodies, which are thus described:—

These two bodies represent, both in form and colour, two white haricot beans; and that so exactly, that it requires some minutes' attention to avoid falling into a gross error. One of the borders is rounded, the other flattened; towards the centre of each is a well-marked hilum; the lateral faces are convex. These two bodies, weighing each thirty-two grains, were adherent one to the other; their tissue, if it may be so called, seeing that it was not at all organized, is fatty, soft to the touch, disposed in laminae, very delicate, and tearing with great facility. This matter was mixed up with an infinite number of small hairs, the longest measuring three-fifths of an inch, fine, silky, mingled together, and twisted on themselves—here occurring separately, and at another place entangled in little tufts, the end of which passed out on one side of the mass, (at the point constituting the hilum.) Examined under the microscope, these hairs presented no bulbous extremity; from their transparency and silvery aspect one could call them dead; they contained no fluid.

After the extrusion of these two bodies, there was a rapid recovery. The next day the cyst exuded some healthy pus; a probe passed into the cyst, penetrated about one and three-fifths of an inch. By degrees the cyst collapsed and shrunk, and was lost sight of in the hollow of the umbilicus. The matter which escaped from the cyst was partly soluble in alcohol, another part in ether; the residue, examined under the microscope, presented scales, epidermal debris, and short brown hairs. The substance, therefore, resembled that contained in sebaceous follicles, as observed by the author of the chemical analysis; and we think that the peculiar tumour in question was no other than some extremely distended sebaceous follicles. Looking upon such as its origin; we have an explanation, first, of the appearance of laminae, from the gradual deposit of new matter constantly internally to the older portions; and, in the next place, of the hairs which were met with in the fatty substance; hairs, it would appear from the description, such as are met with on the delicate parts of the skin. From the symptoms, some inflammation seems to have been set up in the sac of the tumour, and perhaps also about the integuments immediately surrounding it, giving rise to the pain on pressure. Whether this source of pain alone is sufficient to account for the very sharp pain occurring at the onset of the man's illness, may be open to some doubt. However, an attack of abdominal pain need not be, in this, as in most cases where it happens, attributed to any internal inflammation, as was diagnosed by the physician first in attendance, and on account of which the patient was so actively treated by leeches.

ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.—MAY 24TH.

Nature of the Membrana Decidua.

A NOTE was read by M. COSTE on the nature of the decidua formed around the ovum in the human subject. He first alludes to the hypothesis now generally looked upon as the right one—viz., that the cavity of the uterus becomes, after impregnation, completely lined by a membrana decidua, thrown out from its mucous membrane; that the ovum, on arriving at the opening of the Fallopian tube into the uterine cavity, can only proceed in its course by pushing this first-formed membrane—the decidua vera—before it, and so inverting a portion of it, by which it will surround itself with another tunic, which, according to this view of its formation, is called decidua reflexa, the two retaining the ovum in its position, and holding between them the hydroperionic liquid. M. Coste then goes on to say, that several facts for a long time led him to doubt the foregoing theory of the deciduas, but that he was disinclined to call it in question openly, until he had made such careful investigations as to convince himself of its error, and such as might lead him to the truth. With these objects he has opened a great number of the bodies of women who have committed suicide, and after several years' experience, he believes he has collected such decisive observations on gestation in the human species, as to remove all doubts from any subject connected with it. He announces this present paper as the first of a series detailing the results of his researches. The present note conveys his views respecting the entry of the impregnated ovum into the uterus, and the formation of the decidual membranes.

"There is never produced normally in the womb of the human female, neither before nor during gestation, any false membrane, or hydroperionic fluid, and, consequently, the deciduous membranes, as represented, are purely ideal.

"The ovum freely traverses the Fallopian tubes, and penetrates at once into the uterine cavity, and is brought into immediate contact with the hypertrophied mucous membrane, depressing it at the point where the placenta is hereafter to be developed; and the mucous membrane itself, influenced by the action the ovum sets up in it, swells and rises as a prominent ring around it, or as a circular fold, which at length covers over and encloses it, constituting what has been named the decidua reflexa. As this coat, according to my observations, is a prolongation of the uterine mucous membrane, it has, at the first, the same structure as it. It is glandular and vascular in all its extent, like the mucous membrane. Later, however, all these traces of organization fade and disappear, but their existence may be very readily recognised in uteri during the first month of gestation. I have several specimens in my collection which leave no doubt on this matter. We may also remark, on the most prominent point of the reflected layer, a sort of cicatrix or umbilical depression, which indicates the spot where the circular fold of the uterine mucous membrane to envelope the ovum, was effected.

"This then, in the human species, has no relation, except with the mucous membrane of the uterus; and when, in cases of abortion, or after parturition, the ovum is expelled, it is the exfoliated mucous membrane which it carries away with it. The results which I have just made known differ so much from the views generally received, that I determined not to expose myself to their responsibility, until the facts had become irresistible. I now offer them confidently, and am persuaded that if no one as yet has been able to explain the problem, it has arisen from the difficulty of procuring wombs in an early stage after impregnation."

In conclusion, M. Coste observes, that he is not alone in his belief of the error of the present opinion respecting the early history of the ovum, since Dr. Sharpey too partakes in it; and that the latter has proposed two explanations, one of which may readily be reconciled with his own views.

At the séance following the one on which the preceding paper was read, a communication was received, calling attention to the fact that in M. Valentin's Report on the Progress of Physiology, it was mentioned that M. Pappenheim also was opposed to the received opinion regarding the ovum and its membranes.

SUGGESTION FOR A BATHING ESTABLISHMENT ON THE SERPENTINE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Nothing would conduce more to the health of thousands than a bathing establishment in the midst of the Serpentine in Hyde-park.

This establishment might occupy the centre part of the Serpentine, and consist of a series of bathing-boxes, so arranged as to enclose a considerable area, being connected by a platform of wood of various appropriate depths; its exterior being painted green and white, would make it ornamental towards the Park, whilst the access to it might be on the south side of the river.

The present bathers in the Serpentine are left without the slightest accommodation, and restrained, at the present time, to the hours between six and eight o'clock A.M., and to an evening hour. What person of delicate health can bathe under such circumstances, and at such periods of the day? The bathing establishment should be open all day long, certain hours on Sunday excepted; and every comfort and assistance should be afforded. The servants of the Royal Humane Society might with great propriety be employed to perform certain offices in the establishment.

All this might be most readily accomplished by means of a subscription, and of tickets of admission of moderate price.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

London, May, 1847.

PHILANTHROPOS.

THE SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In reply to your correspondent "Tyro," will you allow me to state that I cannot take any notice of anonymous communications. Should "Tyro," however, come forward in his own name, I will be happy to answer any proper question. And should he adopt this course, perhaps he will, at the same time, refer me to the exact passages in Müller's Physiology to which he alludes; for, I confess, I do not remember them.—I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

Upper Marylebone-street, June, 1847.

T. SNOW BECK.