

CONGENITAL DISEASE OF THE HEART.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—If you think the following case sufficiently instructive, or curious, to merit a place in your valuable periodical, it is quite at your service. I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

CHAS. W. STEEL, M.R.C.S., &c.
Lewisham, March 5, 1838.

On Dec. 20th, 1837, Mrs. C—— requested me to visit her son, a boy aged 14 years, whom I have with much interest watched during the last three years, with a view to determine, by examination, whether the malformation of heart, under which he evidently laboured, was or was not a patulous state of the foramen ovale.

I found him suffering from dyspnoea, increased by the horizontal position; cough; slight expectoration of a white frothy mucus; pulse small, weak, and irregular; chest dull on percussion, on either side, over its whole extent; respiratory murmur nearly inaudible. He had become worse several days, cyanosis affecting the lips, palpebræ, tip of the nose and ears, and, more faintly, the fingers. He complained of excessive coldness, which he could not remove, though wrapped in blankets before a large fire. Purgatives and expectorants were given with some benefit.

Jan. 2. He now complained of pain in the right arm, which was swelled, oedematous, and exceedingly tender on pressure. The swelling, in a few hours, extended upwards over the shoulder, and right upper half of the chest; the left arm then became affected, the swelling commencing as in the right, and spreading upwards, over the head, neck, and thorax.

14. The blueness had now greatly increased in intensity; the network of superficial veins was beautifully apparent, spreading over the whole of the above-mentioned portions of the body; a deep purple in colour; hard and corded to the touch. Some of these veins were pricked to relieve the tension; the blood that flowed was like viscid treacle, as black as ink, and a dark serum escaped from the cellular tissue.

20. His mind became occasionally confused (delirious would be too strong a term), at other times he was torpid, requiring to be aroused before questioned.

23. The circulation had now ceased at the wrist; the fingers and hands had mortified; a black sanies was distilling from under the nails, from the corners of the eyes, and from the lips.

26. He died this morning, without being convulsed, appearing to suffer much.

29. *Autopsy.*—The hands and the lower

parts of the forearms mortified; eyes, lips, tip of the nose quite black; and the rest of the upper half of the body of a more or less deep shade of colour, and oedematous. The lower extremities neither oedematous or discoloured. The pleura and pericardium both contained fluid, the former to the amount of several pints. The lungs exceedingly small, but healthy. The heart very large; the right ventricle dilated and hypertrophied, and more capacious than the left. There was a large opening, an inch in extent, in the upper part of the interventricular septum, by which a free communication was afforded between the ventricles. The pulmonary artery, which springs from the ventricle just above this opening, was exceedingly small (not larger than a quill), while the aorta was much larger than usual. The heart contained polypi, and the veins were filled with coagula. No traces of inflammation were found in any of the thoracic viscera.

His mother stated that he had been from birth of a bluish colour, and short-breathed. Had always complained of cold, creeping to the fire even in summer, and with difficulty removed from it; that he was never fond of the pursuits of those of his own age; but though of an indolent disposition, was not affected with drowsiness.

A curious circumstance was observed in the above case, viz., that whilst the whole of the upper half of the body was affected with cyanosis, oedema, &c. the lower half was in a perfectly healthy state, presenting, indeed, in comparison, a shrunken appearance and pallid hue.

Can any of your readers account for this phenomenon? The only probable cause I can assign is this, that the fluid contained in the pleura, by pressing upon the superior cava, impeded the return of venous blood from the upper extremities, whilst the lower extremities were subject to no such impediment to the return of the blood, by reason of the termination of the inferior cava in the auricle immediately on passing the diaphragm, protecting it from any such influence; yet this explanation is far from being satisfactory, for we see cases of hydrothorax every day, but never, as far as I am aware, have such effects manifested themselves in the upper portion of the body only.

FATAL USE OF OBSTETRIC INSTRUMENTS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—I beg to draw your attention to the verdict just transpired at the York Assizes, convicting a Mr. Matthew Pilling, Surgeon, of Sheffield, of manslaughter, upon the charge of causing the death of a woman by using instruments to facilitate the birth of a child. Before relating the particulars I