

Again, the nurses are highly favoured in the situation of the Hospital. Officially twelve miles from Charing Cross, on the direct line to Brighton, and situated in Surrey, one of the loveliest of English counties—there are opportunities for culture and recreation to suit all tastes. A run up to town for a matinée or an evening performance at a theatre, to hear beautiful music, to see lovely pictures, and the innumerable places of interest, ecclesiastical and civic, and, on occasions, the pomp and splendour of Processions of State, and Lord Mayor's Shows; to listen to the proceedings in Parliament, to steep oneself in literature at the British Museum, all these privileges can be enjoyed on days off by those so inclined. To others the sea and the Downs of the sunny South Coast will appeal, and yet others will revel in the fascination of Croydon itself.

We wish the Nursing Staff of the Croydon General Hospital much enjoyment and happiness in their beautiful new Home.

## THE DRAMA OF APPENDICITIS:

### THE STAGE AND THE ACTORS.

*An address given at the East London Children's Hospital on January 29th by W. R. Bett, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., Hon. Secretary, Section of History of Medicine, Royal Society of Medicine.*

From time out of mind has it been one of the articles of human faith, when sorely perplexed by the incongruities and the pathos of Life, to appeal to divers higher deities for comfort and deliverance from anxiety and tribulation. Turn for a moment to that harrowing catalogue of evils from which deliverance may officially be invoked—the pages of the Litany:—

From all evil and mischief; . . . from the crafts and assaults of the devil; . . . and from everlasting damnation,

Good Lord, deliver us.

From all blindness of heart; from pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice; . . . from lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder; . . .

Good Lord, deliver us.

Though this bewildering collection contains a prayer against "hardness of heart," in other words "coronary sclerosis," there is no mention of the thunderbolt of appendicitis—a grave omission. For it is a disease which like the poor is ever with us, sparing neither the infant smiling so innocently upon a wicked world, nor the young woman with the caress of motherhood upon her brow. A few years ago J. A. Berry\* reported the successful removal of a gangrenous appendix from a Crimean veteran aged 90. Recent statistics† show that every year some 20,000 people in the United States of America are killed by a acute appendicitis, and this number is said to be on the increase.

There is little that is romantic or theatrical in the daily surgical routine of a Children's Hospital. "What did Mr. — do this morning?" "Oh, one umbilical and two inguinal hernias." "How thrilling! And what has he got on his waiting-list?" "Seven umbilical and fourteen inguinal hernias, twenty-one tonsils, and one circumcision." There is indeed nothing spectacular about such operations, yet they are the daily bread—though hardly toasted and buttered—to surgeon, anaesthetist, and nurse. What electricity there is in the air when the word goes round: There is an "appendix" downstairs. Is it acute? Is it going

to be done? The case is sent up. The message comes: Get the theatre ready. The operation is performed. The offending appendix is dragged forth from the darkness of its hiding-place, its head is cut off, and what remains is drowned in pure carbolic acid. The patient returns to the ward. In due course his stitches come out. He gets up and goes on his way rejoicing. If it were otherwise, our surgical pride would be grievously wounded. Yet, believe me, it was not always so. May I go over with you to-night in a few brief moments some of the more dramatic episodes in the history of the appendix and of appendicitis? My text is the eighth verse of the eighteenth chapter of the Proverbs: "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." It has recently been claimed‡ that the appendix was known in Egypt in the far-distant days when the Pyramids were young. Viscera removed during the process of mummification were placed in jars, of which some are said to contain inscriptions referring to the "worm of the bowel," obviously the vermiform appendix. However, Mr. Warren R. Dawson, the distinguished Egyptologist, tells us that such a statement is entirely mythical: there is no evidence which could satisfy a critical mind that the Egyptians knew of the existence of the appendix. References in the Ebers and other papyri to "worms in the belly" clearly mean intestinal parasites. The one evidence of appendicitis in Egypt is a body of the Christian (Byzantine) period which according to the practice of the time had not been eviscerated and shows the adhesions of an old appendicitis.§

The appendix was seriously described for the first time in 1524 by Berengario da Carpi, a brilliant scientist who wrote appallingly bad Latin and in his youth narrowly escaped having his nose cut off for plotting against the Duke of Ferrara. Santorini in 1742 described the various positions which the appendix may occupy. The Chinese have a saying: "A woman's tongue is not six inches long, yet it can ruin a man six feet high." In a similarly cynical vein: the appendix is not six inches long, yet it can ruin a surgeon's reputation six decades old. However that may be, it is doubtful whether it serves a useful function in you or me. Many look upon it as a vestige. Sir Arthur Thomson has neatly described man as "a walking museum of relics." Santorini regarded the appendix as a nest for intestinal worms—which indeed it sometimes may be.

It is unlikely that appendicitis is a new disease or one of recent recognition. Listen to the apt words of Sir Thomas Browne||: "Some will allow no Diseases to be new, others think that many old ones are ceased; and that such which are esteemed new, will have but their time. However, the Mercy of God hath scattered the great heap of Diseases, and not loaded any one Country with all: some may be new in one Country which have been old in another." While genuine cases of appendicitis occur comparatively late in the literature, the evacuation of abscesses in the right iliac fossa was fashionable in the second century of the Christian era. Thus Aretæus the Cappadocian writes¶: "I made an opening into an abscess in the colon on the right side, and much pus rushed out, and much also by the kidneys and bladder for several days, and the man recovered." This is evidently a case of perinephric abscess secondary to an appendix abscess, which discharged naturally. So you see, even in those days, surgeons were guided by the 11th commandment: *Ubi pus, ibi evacua*.

Among the landmarks in the history of surgery the discovery of anaesthesia and the inauguration of antiseptic surgery are of paramount importance. On October 16th, 1846, T. G. Morton, a Boston dentist, administered ether

‡ "Annals of Surgery," 1931, p. 179.

§ Bull. Archæol. Surv. Nubia, 1908, i, 32, Plate xxiv.

|| Letter to a Friend.

¶ Ed. and transl. Francis Adams, Sydenham Soc., 1856, p. 312.

\* *Lancet*, 1928, ii, 812-3.

† Proc. Staff Meetings, Mayo Clinic, 1931, vi, 703.

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