

THE DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF ORTHOPEDIC SURGERY.

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Many words in common use have gradually undergone such change and amplification of meaning that their present significance is very different from that with which they started out. "Orthopedy" is one of the words which has experienced this kind of evolution.

The exact derivation of the word is uncertain. Sayre¹ and also Gibney² say that it is derived from *orthos* straight, *paideuo* I teach, and therefore signifies "to teach or educate straight." The medical dictionaries of Gould and of Foster give *orthos* and *païs*, a child, as the derivation; this is accepted by Whitman³ and by Young,⁴ the latter of whom says, "The word orthopedy . . . according to its derivation and its earlier use, implies the art of removing deformities in young children." Others believe the latter part of the word to be derived from the word for foot rather than from the Greek for child, and that in its early use it signified the straightening of deformed feet only. Whatever etymological uncertainty may attach to the word orthopedy, there can be no doubt that early orthopedic practice occupied an exceedingly narrow field, extending little, if at all, beyond the treatment of deformities by various mechanical appliances; and even to-day there is not wanting abundant evidence of a prevailing impression that the therapeutic resources of the orthopedic surgeon are limited to iron rods, leather straps and plaster of Paris bandages.

It is extremely doubtful if a perfectly satisfactory definition of orthopedic surgery is possible, for such definition must be based not upon the derivation of the word orthopedic, nor upon the conception of its scope held by those of a past time; it must represent the actual field of work of the specialists in orthopedic practice of to-day, and they are not fully agreed as to where the line of demarcation between orthopedic and general surgery should be drawn.

Of the many definitions that have been proposed we shall reproduce only two. Royal Whitman³ quotes the following from an American text-book of surgery: "Orthopedic surgery has to do properly with the treatment of deformities and contractions, especially by some form or other of mechanical appliance; though of late its field has been somewhat extended, so as to include the consideration of many of the deformity-producing joint affections." He then shows how imperfectly this statement represents actual orthopedic practice by saying: "Of the two hundred and eighty-four papers to be found in the eight volumes of transactions of this Association" (American Orthopedic Association) "but seventy five are limited to the sixteen subjects that, according to this text-book, represent the scope of orthopedic surgery. Of the seventy-five, thirty-two are on club-foot alone, and nineteen of these consider its operative treatment. One must conclude, then, that this section of a modern text-book represents the orthopedic surgery of a past time." Whitman then suggests the following definition, basing it upon the view that the scope and compass of