

Surgery.

"CALAMITIES OF SURGERY."

This is the title of one of the very valuable series of "Clinical Lectures and Essays" recently published by Sir James Paget. It contains so many hints for the direction of those who devote themselves to the subject of surgery that a brief synopsis of it will not be unprofitable.

The author treats the subject under two leading heads; first, the care that the surgeon should exercise in deciding upon and recommending an operation; and secondly, the various necessary precautions that should be observed after an operation has been decided upon.

Under the first division of the subject, the author speaks as follows:—"First of all, the consideration that you are liable to these calamities should be an incentive to the most earnest and continual study of your profession, that you may avert all avoidable ignorance; and to constant discipline in watchfulness, that you may overlook nothing that can contribute to a patient's welfare."

"And you should study very carefully all of what are called the minor points of your profession. . . . I refer chiefly to the necessity of cultivating skill in dressing wounds, in the completion of operations, in the looking to all the seemingly little things that, after an operation, minister not only to a patient's comfort, but to his welfare."

"Next, let the liability to these calamities move you never to decide upon an operation except in consideration of the patient's interests alone." This is a warning which, it is to be feared, is not always as conscientiously followed as it ought to be. Rising surgeons, in their desire to acquire a reputation in their profession, too often undertake operations of doubtful propriety, from the fact that the issue of such operations is at best only problematical. On this point Sir James Paget very judiciously says:—"When an operation is decided on, you may add a desire for your own reputation to the motives that will induce you to do the best you possibly can for the patient; but this,

which is a very fair motive for the careful performance of an operation, is a very foul one in determining whether an operation should be done or not."

The next item of useful advice which the distinguished author presents is, "never to decide upon an operation, even of a trivial kind, without first examining the patient as to the risks of his life. You should examine him with at least as much care as you would for a life insurance. It is surely at least as important that a man should not die or suffer serious damage after an operation, as that his life should be safely insured for a few hundred pounds." After dwelling upon the importance of observing this precaution, at considerable length, Sir James Paget says in conclusion:—"If I were to count the number of preventible calamities in surgery that I have known, I should find the majority of them due to the oversight of personal defects in the patients operated on; defects in the habits, the constitution, or the previous diseases, which ought to have been ascertained before the risk of the operation was incurred."

Another most excellent piece of advice is conveyed in the following language:—"When you have decided on an operation, never make light of it. Never talk to the patient flipantly about its being what is called 'nothing,' a mere snip, a mere cut, a mere this or that. . . . You need not alarm the patient; you may say that the risk of an operation is not greater than that which he would incur for much less sufficient motives. . . . So you may fairly guard yourselves, and give your patients a just measure of warning, by saying that the risk of a proposed operation is not greater than the risk of this or that thing which they willingly do for amusement. But unless you are prepared to say that the risk is not greater than ought to be incurred for the good which may be expected to follow, you ought not to do the operation at all."

Upon the amount of good likely to follow an operation, Sir James Paget says:—"The surgeon alone can in most cases estimate it. In most cases, therefore, we must take the whole responsibility of operations, for it is only on our statements that patients can rely in