

Original Communications.

Remarks on Two Cases of Dropsy and their Treatment, by CASEY A. WOOD of Ottawa.

It is customary, in speaking of dropsy, to insist that it is more the symptom of a disease than a disease in itself, and that it is much more scientific to treat the original trouble than the mere symptom; but it often happens that it is difficult or impossible to ascertain during the life of the patient where the primary disease is, or even, in some cases, the post mortem examination does not give any satisfactory clue to its real seat. "Practically speaking, in such cases," observes Dr. Watson, "the dropsy is the disease and the sole object of treatment."

Furthermore, the liquid collections constituting dropsy may prove to be the most troublesome and distressing part of renal, cardiac or hepatic disease, and it may, by its presence, cause all the patient's suffering, as well as most of the danger to his life. In removing the dropsy we get rid, for a longer or shorter period, of a dangerous symptom, make him comfortable, and bring him to what is, as far as his feelings are concerned, a complete state of health.

It not unfrequently happens that anasarca is secondary to causes totally unconnected with organic disease of the heart or kidneys, as we see in the sudden stoppage of perspiration more or less profuse. When a laboring man, for instance, through continued bodily exertion, has brought himself into a copious perspiration, and while in this state gets chilled or wet through, the exhalation of watery vapor from the cutaneous surface is suddenly checked, and in a very short time the man may find himself everywhere anasarcaous.

So also in debilitated persons and those suffering from anæmia and chlorosis, in whom the heart's action is weak and unable to propel with sufficient force the necessary quantum of blood, general dropsy may supervene. Here, of course, the organ is merely functionally deranged.

In the first of these cases the anasarca is the chief thing to be treated, and, when that is got rid of, the patient may be said to be cured. In the latter case constitutional treatment with iron and other tonics is, of course, called for, but the first thing and, for a time the chief thing, to be removed is the dropsical effusion.

While all this is unquestionably true, it would, of course, be unwise to do nothing for the primary trouble, the cause of the dropsy. While getting rid

of its most troublesome and uncomfortable symptom no one could call in question the advisability of treating the real disease, and yet how seldom it is that any treatment avails for serious lesions of the kidney or right heart, or how often it is that nothing can be done for organic liver disease and other obstructions to the portal circuit—the most fertile causes of ascites? The one thing to be pursued is that of palliation, and usually the only symptom that requires looking after is—dropsy. It was for the purpose of introducing what has proved a most effectual mode of quickly removing the fluid accumulations of anasarca and ascites that the following notes were prepared. In the cases themselves there is nothing peculiar.

In the first one anasarca came on as the result of overwork and careless exposure, aggravated by kidney disease. The second case was one of ascites, which came on gradually and was traceable to derangement of the liver. The reports are incomplete, as it was not intended to enter into their pathology, diagnosis, etc., but only with the intention of considering the effect of a certain plan of treatment on them. The mode employed is not a new one altogether, but its employment has not been urged, by writers on the subject, with that positiveness which the results obtainable by its use certainly call for.

The first case, to be briefly mentioned, was that of a man J. F., æt. 44, an axeman in one of the shanties. In March, 1875, he noticed that his feet began to swell slightly, and, although he had no pain in the ankle, he applied to and received medicine from a neighboring physician for rheumatism. He grew rapidly worse, so bad at last that he had to leave his work in the shanty and take a long cold journey to the city. When he reached this place the swelling had extended until his face and neck were painfully bloated, and the function of respiration so interfered with that the only position he could get any ease in was by leaning over a desk or high table. He went under the care of a physician who gave him some remedies that nauseated him very much, and yet caused very little diaphoretic effect. Seemingly disheartened at the small effect his course of treatment had upon the case the physician advised him to go home at once, and assured him that he could not live more than four or five days. This same advice was given him a second time by another medical gentleman he applied to, and had there not been something effectual done a short time afterwards their prognostications would have been veri-