

A PLEA FOR THE OPEN METHOD OF TREATING FRACTURES OF THE PATELLA.

By F. N. G. STARR, M.B.,

Demonstrator of Anatomy, Medical Faculty, University of Toronto.

MR PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—About two years ago I read a paper before this society on the "Open Method of Treating Fractures." In the course of that paper I related a series of cases in which by various manipulations it was impossible to secure accurate approximation of the broken fragments, and because of this I had cut down upon the recent fracture, brought the fragments together, and secured them by means of silver wire. Of course it was urged against this procedure, that I had converted a simple fracture into a compound, and that such practice is to be deplored. With a still further experience in such cases, I desire to repeat here what I then contended, that an aseptic compound fracture with accurate apposition tends to a much better result than a simple fracture left to unite in a faulty position, with all its associated deformity and loss of use.

While I think I shall never be guilty of advising the open method of treatment for all fractures of the patella, I am inclined to advocate this method in all cases, and for the following reasons: first, the fact that by this method one secures bony union. Second, that the period of convalescence is shortened from three, or even six months, to from three to six weeks. Third, that bony union never occurs in cases treated by the use of the time-honored splint and the various mechanical devices, because of the tension caused by the swelling and blood clot in the joint, and because of the fact that the periosteum is never, or rarely, torn at the same level that the patella is broken, and it therefore overlaps the fractured surface. Fourth, that in cases in which fibrous union occurs there is a tendency for the fragments to become further separated when the sufferer begins to walk. Fifth, that when fibrous union has allowed sufficient separation to occur to give rise to awkwardness in walking it is then difficult to secure good approximation and an ideal result by an open operation, because of the atrophy that has occurred in the broken fragments. Sixth, that according to Dr. Powers (1) the results are satisfactory in 94 per cent. of the cases treated by the open method. His observations include seven hundred and eleven cases which he was able to collect.

My reason for bringing this subject before you is that upon several occasions, when I have advocated the treatment, I have been somewhat severely criticised for suggesting such a dangerous procedure. At the same time I feel that an apology is due to some surgeons here for

(1) *Annals of Surgery*, p. 67—July, 1898.