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CONTENTS.

ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.		PAGE	PAGE
A Case of Consecutive Chronic Dementia, involving an important Medico-Legal Question, by Henry Howard, M.D., M.R.C.S.E., Visiting Physician Longue Pointe Lunatic Asylum.....	169	New Kymograph, by George Wilkins, M.D., M.R.C.S., Eng., Professor of Pathology and Lecturer in Practical Physiology University of Bishop's College, Physician to the Montreal General Hospital.....	174
Primary Double Amputation of the Thighs, successfully and synchronously performed for railway injuries to the legs, by John L. Bray, M.D., Chatham, Ont.....	172	PROGRESS OF MEDICAL SCIENCE	
		On the Treatment of Acute Rheumatism by Salicin and Salicylic Acid, 180—Management of Natural Labor.....	183
		EDITORIAL.	
		Montreal General Hospital, 187—Pu- erperal Malarial Fever, 189—Doc- tor's Bills, 190—Volunteer Medical Officers, 191—Laval University Hospital, 191—Woman's Hospital of Montreal, 191—University of Bishop's College, 192—Personal... 193	
		Reviews.....	193
		Medico-Chirurgical Society, of Mon- treal.....	194
		Marriage and Death.....	196

Original Communications.

A CASE OF CONSECUTIVE CHRONIC DEMENTIA, INVOLVING AN IMPORTANT MEDICO-LEGAL QUESTION.

By HENRY HOWARD, M.D., M.R.C.S.E., Visiting Physician Longue Pointe Lunatic Asylum.

(Read before the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Montreal, 19th March, 1880.)

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—Seeing how very common is that mental state known as dementia, and how that all the lunatic asylums in the world are crowded with that class of patients, dementia, of one form or another, from numerous different causes, I am afraid that you must be surprised that I did not choose a case of some other form of insanity, or in sanity in some other stage, than that of dementia.

I have chosen this case not because that it in any respect differed from a number of others in the asylum, but because this particular case happened to be the cause of a circumstance that involved a very important medico-legal question. The whole case turned upon the one single point, was it possible, under certain circumstances, that a certain crime could be committed? This was the question I was called upon to solve. The Court was two Commissioners. The accusers had two clever lawyers, and the accused, one, and I assure you that never in my life did I get such a cross-examination as I did in that case; never, in my life, did I see such a determination on the part of lawyers to bring

in the accused guilty. Surely if ever two men deserved to be well paid by their clients, these two lawyers did. Well, my testimony was that the crime could not be committed, and so the case broke down.

I will try and bring the case before you in as delicate a manner as I possibly can, so as not to shock your sensibilities; you will yourselves easily supply that which I cannot put into language. The question was, could priapism take place in a man suffering from consecutive chronic dementia, or rather a certain man whose case I will just now give you? If it could, then the crime could have been committed; if it could not, then the crime could not have been committed. At all times, and under any circumstances, the crime of which the accused was charged would be a disgusting and unnatural crime, but, under the circumstances in this case, the man that would be guilty of it, we would be bound, in very charity, to look upon as a morally insane man.

CASE.

When my attention was first called to A. B., aged about 35, he was sitting naked in his cell, crouched in the corner, in dog-like fashion, his genital organs hanging down, and resembling more a piece of dirty intestines than the genitals of a man. He was so emaciated that his bones were simply covered with skin, and his skin was broken and ulcerated in different parts, particularly over his joints. His head, face, hands and body were smeared with his own