OBLIQUE SECTION OF THE SKIN IN SURGICAL OPERATIONS.

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In the great majority of the cutting operations of surgery, it is an object to attain as early and as effectual closure of the wounds made as possible. The exceptions are those which are undertaken for the purpose of establishing artificial openings, as for example tracheotomy, colotomy, gastrotomy, etc. And in ligation of arteries in their continuity, the presence of the ligature must of course prevent the closure of the track in which it lies. Yet in almost all even of these cases. the wound in the skin must be of such extent that a large portion of it may be healed without interfering with the result aimed at ; while not only the comfort but the well being of the patient is promoted by the early exclusion of the atmosphere from the deeper tissues.

Another advantage is gained by the avoidance of unnecessary scarring. There are many cases of excision of tumours about the face, neck, or hands, in which the persistence of unsightly marks would give rise to a degree of mortification to the bearers of them, which it is not beneath the dignity of surgical science to endeavour to prevent. And I think that it may be asserted that whatever adds to the precision of our procedures, or to the elegance or neatness of our results, is worthy of a place among the resources of our art.

Unless exception is taken to the correctness of these premises, an apology will hardly be needed for the suggestions to which your attention is now asked.

About six years ago, my attention was accidentally called to the fact that after oblique division of the skin, healing took place readily, and the resulting scar was small as compared with that usually left by vertical section. I was summoned to a woman who, while carrying a glass dish, had fallen and sustained a severe wound on the hand, which extended from the wrist to the knuckle-bone of the ring-finger. By the peculiar position of the edge of the fragment, the skin had been cleanly divided in an extremely oblique direction. Healing took place promptly, and to my surprise and

the patient's gratification, the cicatrix was very much smaller than might have been expected from an injury so formidable in appearance as this had been.

It occurred to me to imitate this accident in surgical procedures, with the view simply of lessening the ensuing disfigurement—nor was I disappointed. On one occasion having removed an old bursal tumour from over the patella, I was unable to find the line of junction between the edges of the section of the skin.

Now, the mere lessening of scars has more than a cosmetic value. Every one knows how apt they are to be for a long time the seat of tenderness, sometimes exquisite, and how sensitive they often are to cold, as well as to barometric changes. By reducing the exposed portion of cicatrix, we do much to obviate these inconveniences, which are especially annoying to the working classes, among whom the accidents requiring operation are by far the most frequently met with.

Another danger to which scars are very liable is that of the development of keloid tumours; and the closer the union, the less of what a few years ago was called by microscopists *inodular tissue*, the less will be the probability of this very troublesome and intractable disease.

Quite recently it has occurred to me to develop another and much greater advantage of the oblique section of the skin, namely, the avoidance of suppuration, and the obtaining of very prompt and firm union between the cut surfaces. The *rationale* of this advantage can be easily seen. We have a close apposition of very wide surfaces, with exclusion of the air from the cavity of the wound, by means of a strictly valvular arrangement—the apposition of the edges being moreover favoured by atmospheric pressure.

An application of the same principle in the arts affords an excellent illustration of the idea I am trying to urge.

It is often necessary to make belting, for the use of machinists, of a length much greater than could possibly be got from a single strip of hide. Hence several pieces have to be put together, and this joining or splicing must be done so as to be as strong as possible. For this purpose the ends of the pieces are bevelled