

advance or propulsion of the hardened feces is checked at the muco-cutaneous junction by the thickened skin, and the fissure is always in an irritated and in an inflamed condition. This inflammation causes edema of the skin at the muco-cutaneous junction, and an inflamed, puffy, edematous, teat-like skin tag is formed (beneath which is the fissure) which is known as the "sentinel pile." This "sentinel pile" is also characteristic of the presence of a fissure, although very often when the fissure has been cured or has healed spontaneously or without operative procedure, this teat-like sentinel pile remains and indicates the presence of a fissure at some previous time.

The sentinel pile is the cause of many errors in diagnosis. Very often physicians on seeing this sentinel pile protruding from the anal orifice make a snap-shot diagnosis of "piles" or "hemorrhoids," and feel very happy and content at making so easy a diagnosis and are so self-satisfied that they do not attempt any further examination which may convince them that there is "more than upon the surface appears," and that this little innocent tag of inflamed skin, which is so often mistaken for a hemorrhoid, has within its folds the fissure which is the cause of all the trouble. The patient, an innocent victim of mistaken diagnosis, is put under a general or local anesthetic, the sentinel pile is cut off, and then the physician is surprised when the patient complains of feeling worse, because now the patient, besides suffering with the pains accompanying the unrepaired fissure, also has a fresh ulceration of the skin which responds as forcibly and as painfully to the spasm of the sphincteric contractions as the original fissure.

Many cases of fissura ani have no sentinel piles, but these are freshly torn and are seen very shortly, say, within a few hours after the tear. When the fissure is freshly torn, the mucous membrane is of normal color, the edges are sharply defined, pliable, not swollen, usually bleeding, and if the bleeding has stopped, is covered with mucous or serum; the sphincter muscle is not contracted and the skin is not inflamed.

Fissures of the anus very rarely heal spontaneously, because when nature makes an attempt to heal the fissure it is so fre-