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PHARMACEUTICAL DEPARTMENT.

Original Communications.

A Paper on Peritonitis. By THOS. H. GAGE, M.D.,
Read before the Worcester, Mass., Association
for Medical Improvement, March 12, 1879.

(Communicated to the Canada Medical Record by
George Ball, M.D., Secretary of the Association.)

Peritonitis, in one form or another, is a disease of frequent occurrence, and is in general well understood and easily recognized. To enter upon its discussion, as is done in universally accessible books, would be tedious as well as unnecessary. But we may be pardoned the passing remark that, in view of the present fulness of our knowledge of the disease, it seems surprising that it should have been so very ill understood, and hardly deemed worthy of discussion, only seventy-five years ago. Dr. Cullen in his "First Lines," published in 1807, dismisses peritonitis in a brief paragraph, and only says, in substance, that the symptoms are so obscure that the disease is difficult to recognize; and that, even if it could be more readily known, it would require no particular treatment beyond that of acute inflammation in general. And yet it is interesting to observe that, as he passes on from this dismissal of peritonitis to the description of other acute abdominal inflammations (notably that of "phlegmonous and erythematic" gastritis), he is evidently talking and describing what we now know to be acute diffuse inflammation of the peritoneum.

I do not bring the subject up to-night with any purpose of entering upon a general description or exhaustive essay. The scope is too large for such treatment in the brief time we give to discussion, and I have neither the time nor the ability to do it

justice. My purpose is rather, very briefly, to speak of a few points of personal experience and observation in the disease, which, although comparatively of little importance in themselves, may serve to suggest a course of discussion and remark which will prove both instructive and entertaining. To this I have been led by the circumstance of having seen recently a somewhat unusual number of interesting cases, and by the knowledge that several members of the Association have had occasion to give the disease a fresh investigation and study.

One of the points upon which I wish to speak is the discrepancy between my own experience and observations and the books in regard to the causes of peritonitis. Not that I think I have discovered causes not known to exist before, or that I have any doubt to express as to the efficacy of causes which are usually enumerated; but that I think it not unworthy of mention that, after a practice of twenty-five years, and having seen a great many cases of the disease, there are so many of the usually mentioned causes, and many which we might infer from the books to be not infrequent, which I have never met with. I have seen peritonitis caused by penetrating wounds of the abdomen, and by numerous surgical operations which have involved opening that cavity. Three times I have seen it caused, and run a rapidly fatal course, from the simple operation of paracentesis in ovarian dropsy. I have often seen it arise from participation of its investing coat in inflammation of the various abdominal organs; more especially in inflammations of the pelvic organs in the female, and of the stomach and intestines in both sexes. I have seen its puerperal form, both simple and septicæmic. I have many times seen it arise