

as my theory may be, I venture to think it is worth the attention of obstetricians especially. It has been possible now and then for me to obtain information from married friends who have been sufficiently interested in the topic to note the results of their family increase, and one or two of a scientific turn of mind have been able, as they say, to verify my conclusions. Obviously, proof is difficult of collection, but obstetricians at least may be asked to note and observe facts as they stand, and may possibly take the trouble to place on record evidence for or against my belief. It is as a provisional hypothesis alone that I advance these views. The only justification they require is that they should not travel outside biological probability, and I would fain hope that, in this respect at least, they conform to the rules of reasonable speculation.—Andrew Wilson, F. R. C. S., in *Lancet*.

"THE SUPPOSED CURATIVE EFFECT OF OPERATIONS *PER SE*."

Of something more than passing interest is a paper by Professor J. William White, of Philadelphia, which has recently appeared in the Aug. and Sept. numbers of the *Annals of Surgery*. The subject of the paper is, perhaps, best conveyed in the author's own opening remarks. He says:—"For some time I have had the idea of collecting and analyzing the various cases recorded in the journals and elsewhere, in which intelligent surgeons, having operated for the relief of symptoms depending upon a supposed pathological basis, have found no such condition, and yet the patient recovered, not only from the operation, but from the original ailment." The author then passes on to consider—first, the recorded cases, and, secondly, the possible explanation of the phenomena observed.

There can be but few surgeons who have not, in the course of their experience, had cases which recall results similar to many that are referred to here. To operate and find nothing, and yet the patient to be relieved of his symptoms, is sometimes strange enough; but, more mysterious still, are those cases where something is found, and where the surgeon honestly feels that nothing that he did seems sufficient to explain the cure that has been effected. After reading such a paper as that here referred to, the temptation almost lingers in the surgeon's mind that no protracted case, either obscure in its symptoms, or even obvious in its signs, should be allowed to pass without some tentative surgical measure. There is something as mysterious almost in contemplating many of these results as there is in considering the cases which are now said to result from the therapeutical use of hypnotism. It is, of course, quite possible that

many results obtained in both cases are effected through similar internal agencies, and with this Professor White deals more extensively later. But the difficulty of explanation can hardly be said to be easier in the one case than in the other. For while certainly the distance between cause and effect seems often far enough in hypnotism, it cannot be said to be any closer in cases where one epileptic is cured by castration and another by tracheotomy.

The major part of the first portion of Professor White's paper (August number) is mainly taken up with a consideration of these epileptic cases. From various sources the author has collected 154 cases where operations were performed, and in which little or nothing was found to account for the symptoms, but either marked benefit or cure followed. The operations performed were various. The larger proportion, however, were cases of trephining; thus, in 56 cases where this operation was performed, and nothing abnormal was found to account for the symptoms, 25 were reported as cured, 18 as improved, and only 3 showed signs of relapse later. It should be noted that in nearly all these cases the cause of the fits had been some injury to the head, although, from the tables given, it also appears that some were idiopathic in character.

The operation of ligating large arteries, as the vertebrals and the carotids, was performed in 30 cases, and, judging again from the tables, these apparently were mostly of an idiopathic character. Fourteen of these cases were reported as cured, and 15 as improved. Castration was performed in 10 cases and tracheotomy in 9, and cures were effected in each instance. Many other operations are given, both severe and simple, and with results as difficult to explain as those above indicated.

Following upon these epileptic cases is a series comprising cases of abdominal and pelvic disorders. Of these, it may be said that diseases of the most diverse character have been relieved, if not cured, by apparently ineffectual operative measures. Thus, we find simple laparotomy (*i.e.*, nothing more than opening the abdomen) performed with success for tubercular peritonitis, pain in the stomach with persistent vomiting, distressing renal symptoms, intestinal obstruction, severe localized pelvic pain, supposed pyosalpinx, large fibroid tumor of uterus, pelvic adhesions, obscure hepatic symptoms with jaundice, and many other conditions. As a sub-division of this class are operations upon the genito-urinary tract. Of these, the most striking are operations for supposed kidney calculus, where nothing has been found to account for the symptoms, and yet the result of the operation has been their entire disappearance.

In attempting to offer some reasonable explanation of the phenomena observed in the above cases, Professor White considers those conditions which