

the one must have mathematically conformed to the angles and lines of the other. Entertaining such views, it is natural for many to wonder at the unwillingness of medical men to give a positive opinion in particular cases. They forget that "there is a doubt that springs from knowledge." In the present instance, I conceived that the wound, which I have described, might have been made by a round smooth bullet, or by a somewhat irregularly shaped one. I did not feel justified in making the hair-breadth distinction which seemed to be expected. The human body is composed of materials of such different density and elasticity, so diversely arranged so variously circumstanced in their several portions, that it is idle and unphilosophical to expect always to realize the same appearance of parts, even though they may have suffered from external violence, apparently or precisely the same. This truth is forcibly exemplified by the discussion which took place in the French Academy, after the revolution of 1848, respecting the size and appearance of the orifice of entrance and exit of gun-shot wounds. It had been considered an established fact, that the orifice of entrance was smaller and more regular than the orifice of exit. In this discussion we find M. Blandin maintaining the contrary opinion, and asserting that he had never met with a single gun-shot wound, during the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, in which the aperture of entrance was not *larger* than that of exit; and the observation of no less a surgeon than M. Malgaigne was confirmatory of this remark. M. Roux thought that there was no absolute rule, much depending upon the force and direction of the impelling power.\* If, then, such competent observers as these differ so essentially, upon a point apparently of easy solution, can we be often justified in referring a particular appearance of a gun-shot wound solely to some modification of the body inflicting the injury? I think not, believing as I do, that the force, distance and direction of the impelling power, as remarked by M. Roux, together with many other circumstances, give to these wounds their character. We are told by Hennin, Guthrie, and other military surgeons, that, under peculiar circumstances, a round smooth bullet will inflict an injury closely simulating an incised wound, and that the same agent will also, at times, present us with an irregular, jagged wound. These, it is true, are exceptional cases; yet, when the question of life or death depends upon a word from us, it is well to have them in mind. We are guilty of no assumption when we say that the issue of life or death, in these cases, may depend upon a word from the physician. An individual in Delaware, not many years ago, was killed, by being shot through the body. It was proved that his assailants stood on opposite sides to his person. One of

\* Brit. and For. Med. Chir. Rev., Oct. 1848.