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THE ETIOLOGY AND TREATMENT OF EMPYEMA.

BY

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Empyema is a term which has undergone a good deal of alteration in meaning within a few years, but, with your permission, I shall restrict its use this evening to indicate a collection of pus within the pleural cavity.

Almost the first surgical dressings which I saw applied last year was an aseptic compress intended to soak up malodorous pus, which was discharging from an intercostal sinus. The marked scoliosis and pained expression of the patient's face were slight indications of the months of antecedent suffering, and hardly a day passes by that such a dressing is not applied to some unfortunate at one or other of our hospitals. That pus is constantly inimical to the well-being of the human genus, I had in some degree realized, but to what an extent and in what manner, a visit to the Out-door Surgical made plain. When, therefore, the Committee of our Society granted me twenty minutes in which to introduce a discussion here, I determined to make an inquiry into some of the varieties of pus and their varying degrees of virulence in the human body, choosing the neighborhood of the thoracic viscera at one likely to be a typical ground for pus formation.

I soon learned that bacteriology had indicated some few rounded unicellular organisms as lying chiefly at the root of pus formation, notably those which grow in colonies of microscopic bunches or chains.

These lowly creatures, first adequately described by Ogsten and Weichselbaum in their studies of the affliction of Job, had for a time been regarded as specific in pus formation, but shortly afterwards evidence was found that other cocci might, under proper conditions provoke similar results in affections of other parts, as of the urethra, appendix vermiformis, peritoneum, kidneys, meninges of brain and cord and more especially for our present purpose, in affections of the pleura and lungs.

Long before the microscope had been called to the aid of the clinician, however, there had grown up a whole system of symptomatology and treatment of empyema both on the medical and surgical