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Original Articles

THE WIDENING OF THE SCOPE OF ABDOMINAL SURGERY FROM LIFE-SAVING TO HEALTH-RESTORING OPERATIONS*

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It is interesting to recall the fact that abdominal surgery is only a little over a hundred years old; because, although various abdominal operations have been performed by heroic surgeons from the earliest times, it was the establishment upon a secure basis of the operation of ovariectomy that secured the proper recognition of abdominal surgery generally. The first successful ovariectomy was one of the triumphs of the New World, for it was performed by Ephraim McDowell, of Kentucky, in the year 1809. Naturally, this historical case did not by itself establish ovariectomy upon a secure basis; on the contrary, for many years there was much opposition and there were few cases. McDowell himself performed the operation only twelve times, with eight recoveries; and for the span of a generation the attitude of the profession was mainly one either of scepticism or of more or less thinly veiled disapproval. The next important advance was made by Charles Clay, of Manchester; his first successful ovariectomy was in 1842, and in all he operated on three hundred and ninety-five patients, with one hundred and one deaths, his mortality being thus about 25 per cent. Think of the courage that must have been required to persevere in the performance and the advocacy of an operation

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