

T H E

DOMINION MEDICAL JOURNAL.

VOL. II.—No. 3.

TORONTO, ONT., NOVEMBER, 1869.

PRICE, \$2 PER ANNO.

Original Communications.

FRACTURE OF THE SPINE AND RIBS.

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In a previous contribution to this periodical (No. 1, Vol. II), I mentioned, in reference to Fracture of the Sternum, that the existence of a constant local pain, increased by pressure, and of functional incompetence, form reliable diagnostic symptoms of the true nature of the injury. This, however, is not the only instance in which these indications have value in relation to fracture. They are of moment in elucidating injuries of the spinal column and of the ribs at their vertebral extremities, as the accompanying memoir justifies, and are the more important because the patient's condition is occasionally so alarming that a satisfactory examination is altogether precluded, and granting that tactile investigation could be instituted, the depth of the bones and the protection afforded by the soft part, would interfere with the attainment of an accurate opinion on a different basis. The pain may have a peculiar rending, sinking character, easily developed by motion, and thus render probable that a rib has been displaced between the bodies of the adjoining vertebræ. Costal pain and difficult respiration are not, however, caused by fractured ribs alone, but may depend on a muscular rupture, as after sustained violent exertion. In either condition, proper support is indispensable; and, in the latter case, the use of antiphlogistic treatment, as of calomel and antimony, is not of necessity required, as might be, were the stitch dependent on inflammatory condition of the adjacent serous membrane.

A British gentleman, member of a learned profession, resident in Canada West, in the prime of life, sustained an injury of the vertebral

column and of the right side of the chest, 26th March, 1868.

This individual was chopping a large dry spruce, on which another large dry spruce, rotted off at the butt end, was lodged, somewhat high up, in such a way as to fall it east, rather than south, the natural direction of the lay and weight of the trees. At the first movement, the chopped tree inclined to the east as wished, but speedily, owing to the north end of the cut being rotten, heeled round on the stump by the weight of the lodged tree, and, as it neared the ground, inclosed the chopper in the crutch near to its apex. The man was thrown to the ground by the stroke, and lay in a small hollow under the lodged tree. The tree broke in two, at the crutch. The gentleman saw the tree right overhead, but could get no farther for the snow and brush, and expected nothing less than to be transfixed by one of the branches and smashed to a jelly. Fortunately, however, a maple stump close by modified the fall of the trees, and the man, in the horror of the moment, moving his head out of danger, was, by the inclination, merely grazed between the shoulders.

Several lumbermen removed the tree, and by edging a blanket beneath the sufferer, extricated him, and conveyed him to the shanty, where he remained two weeks.

On examination, the vertebral column is injured at the lower part of the right scapula, and again in the region of the last dorsal and of the upper lumbar vertebræ. There is fracture and dislocation of a rib in the neighbourhood of the fifth rib; in all probability it is the fifth rib which is injured. The jaggings of a rib is distinctly felt by the patient, between the scapula and the spine. The sixth and seventh ribs are fractured near their middle, below the right axilla. The seventh is wrenched from its attachment to the cartilage. The tenth is fractured near the spinal column. There is fracture of the spinous process