

I do not want to imply that we had no successes, for I have seen very many brilliant successful lithotomies, removal of tumors and amputations, and I have even seen healing by first intention. But it was strange that one of our surgeons, a very skilful operator, but who after operating visited his patients but seldom, had better results than his colleague, a much more conscientious man, who also was fond of pathology and liked to see the post-mortems on his patients and fussed a good deal over his cases. Needless to say the latter's results were not remarkably good.

We knew nothing about germs at that time and thought that putrefaction was caused by the oxygen of the air. When Pasteur demonstrated that putrefaction was caused by microbes Lister by his previous work, from his student days under Sharpey, was prepared to welcome this discovery and he says in his Third Huxley Lecture: "Thus was presented a new problem; not to exclude oxygen from wounds, which was impossible, but to protect them from the living causes of decomposition by means which should disturb the tissues as little as is consistent with the attainment of the essential object." Since then it has been proved that putrefaction is not the only cause of serious mischief in wounds, for there are microbes which are odorless and yet produce profound septic effects.

At this period and for some time after it was a common thing for the operating room orderly to be also orderly in the post-mortem room. Hence the better results of operations performed in the country or private houses than those performed in hospitals. When I visited London in 1873 I found the results of the surgeons fairly good, in fact London and English surgery was always clean and the results excellent for that period, and this is one of the reasons why antiseptic surgery made such slow progress in London. Whilst in Germany the surgery of that time was very dirty and neither personal cleanliness nor the cleanliness of hospitals a distinguishing feature, the results were accordingly bad, hence Listerism was adopted with avidity and the change to antiseptic surgery revolutionized the German methods with such amazing improvement in the death rate that soon they out-Listered Lister.

When I was in Vienna in 1874-5 antiseptics had not yet been introduced and surgical mortality was tremendous. I never saw an operation for strangulated hernia recover and sepsis prevailed everywhere, even the great Billroth had often disastrous results; twelve years later when I visited Europe