

Obituary.

SIR SPENCER WELLS.

Another of the great medical worthies of the Victorian era has passed away in the person of Sir Spencer Wells. So many have left us lately that the obituary notices have in this instance been relatively brief, and yet Sir Spencer accomplished work that will not easily be forgotten, and he will surely always be counted among the great surgeons of the century. We well know that others before him had performed ovariectomy. Old Latin writers refer to the removal of the ovaries of the healthy female by the Egyptians and Lydians, and even at the present time the custom has not died out among the aboriginal Australians and in sundry parts of India, while both in England and America the diseased ovaries had been removed years before Spencer Wells appeared upon the scene. Others again in late years have performed the operation with a more brilliant technique and a yet greater measure of success. But he may rightly be said to have been the first to *practice* the operation, and he it was who by his practice and by his writings fixed the attention of our profession upon this mode of relieving much suffering in the gentler sex, and who again, by the successive publication of his 2000 cases of ovariectomy with failures as fully treated as successes, demonstrated to the medical public wherein lay the advantages and the dangers of the operation.

There is no good movement but is liable to be harmed by zealots, and—let us acknowledge it straightly—by fools, and we have sorrowfully to admit that the conservative and cautious procedure of Sir Spencer Wells has at times been replaced, on the part of some of his followers, by rash and utterly indefensible ablation of the internal genitalia. But all must acknowledge that the benefits conferred upon woman-kind—the arrest of agony, the return to healthy activity, the gift of years of life—all these far exceed any abuse of ovariectomy that has occurred during the last forty years. While further we must acknowledge that the successful results obtained by the ovariectomists have led to the remarkable expansion of abdominal surgery in general.

Though born in 1818, almost within sight and sound of St. Paul's Sir Spencer Wells was not a London student proper, nor had he the ordinary career of the great London surgeon, rising by slow degrees from one hospital appointment to the other. On the contrary before