

The Surgical Treatment
of Gallstones ✓ ✓

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THE SURGICAL TREATMENT OF GALL- STONES.

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The treatment of gallstones can be divided into medical and surgical. For many years the medical treatment prevailed and the greater benefits to be obtained by surgical treatment were not duly appreciated. Owing to the great advances made in surgery the tables have been turned and the sufferers from gallstones obtain a much greater measure of relief. I know but little of the so-called medical treatment of gallstones, and I am very skeptical as to its practical value.

DANGERS INCURRED BY PATIENTS SUFFERING FROM GALLSTONES.

Not only is there a danger of sudden death from the passage of a gallstone, but there are many other dangers to be encountered. There is the great danger of gangrene of the gall bladder (closely resembling gangrene of the vermiform appendix), with rupture and death or with the formation of a secondary abscess; there is the danger of inflammation with empyema of the gall bladder, accompanied by chills, high fever and the occurrence of a suppurative pyelophlebitis followed by death. There is the danger that septic infection may travel from some ulcer produced by gallstone irritation of the mucous membrane of the gall bladder or ducts to the vessels of the liver. Even when no pus is to be found either in the gall bladder or gall ducts these septic conditions may spread beyond the confines of the gall bladder and produce inflammation of the peritoneum and surrounding structures. Abscesses may form external to the gall bladder and may perforate in various directions, up-

wards to the right pleural cavity, forwards through the skin or backwards into the posterior hepatic pouch. These are grave conditions, and if they do not terminate fatally the patient is liable to be ill for many weeks.

I have seen one patient die from shock produced by the passage of a gallstone through the common bile duct, and, a few years ago, I saw a gallstone that was presented to one of our medical societies after it had been removed postmortem from the common bile duct of a patient who died suddenly from shock during its attempted passage. Many other cases of death from this cause have been reported. Obstruction of the common bile duct by stone frequently occurs in patients advanced in years, so that this serious complication must be considered as a constant menace to those who are suffering from cholelithiasis.

A few weeks ago I removed a gallstone from the common bile duct of a woman aged 65, who was suffering for the first time from continued jaundice and who did not know that she was troubled with gallstones, though 147 were removed from the gall bladder. A more frequent resort to surgical treatment would prevent the occurrence of this serious condition in elderly people and would also prevent that slow and living death that is to be looked forward to by many of these sufferers. They begin to have fever and chills and intermittent attacks of jaundice with impairment of the appetite and a loss of strength. The excessive use of opiates and alcoholic stimulants makes them still more miserable until death finally ends the scene.

A patient suffering from gallstones may, at any moment, become seriously ill and the surgeon will find himself face to face with as great a responsibility as if he was dealing with a case of acute appendicitis. At any time these patients may have a violent outbreak of a rapidly fatal cholecystitis with cholangitis. Repeated inflammations may produce such a condition of chronic inflammatory exudate as to prevent the surgeon from carrying out surgical measures for their relief. When brought face to face with these serious complications our responsibilities are increased.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

In discussing the surgery of the region occupied by gallstones we must consider the organs with which we

have to deal. Stones may find a lodgment in the ducts throughout any part of their course, or in the gall bladder, or in both. When removing these stones we are called on to open hollow organs that are liable to leak, to peel away tissues from a solid organ that is liable to bleed, and to readily absorb septic material, and we are called on to open ducts that are lying in close proximity to blood vessels that may be injured. The leakage of bile from open ducts and from an opened gall bladder was to be feared before attention was drawn by Morison to the post-hepatic pouch and to the safety of gauze drainage by my friend, Dr. W. E. B. Davis, Birmingham, Ala., after he had demonstrated its usefulness in many experiments on dogs.

Morison's pouch should be used for drainage in all cases in which post-operative leakage is liable to occur. The method I have adopted is to institute through-and-through drainage by means of a piece of rubber tubing entering through the wound in front and emerging through a counter opening at the deepest part of this pouch. Not only should a rubber drainage tube be used, but iodoform gauze packing should be placed over the leaking point or points to still further assist the tube. With a due attention to this matter many of the operations for the removal of gallstones are robbed of their terrors and patients who formerly would have died can now be carried safely through.

Owing to the introduction of this method of drainage it is no longer necessary to break up calculi by the needling process, or to open the intestine for the purpose of removing a stone from the common duct, and why? Because we no longer are afraid to make a direct incision over the stone into even the most friable duct. Then, if necessary, we can readily break up the stone by means of gallstone forceps passed through the opening.

CHOLECYSTOSTOMY.

Gallstones are found most frequently in the gall bladder. They are sometimes formed with great rapidity. Among my collection I have several thousand taken from the gall bladder of one patient.

CASE 1.—In February, 1897, he had his first attack. Cholecystostomy was performed, a fistulous opening remained, and this was closed by two sutures. In November, 1897, he again had colic and jaundice; in March, 1898, Dr. Tiffany of Balti-

more operated on him. He found no stones. In June, 1898, he was still in the hospital suffering from attacks of colic and transient jaundice. The gall bladder was again opened, but no stones were found. July 3 he suffered from a blow on the head for which a portion of the skull was elevated. In August, 1899, his colicky pains returned. October 1 he had colic for four days and was then jaundiced for two months. In November he was operated on again, for the fourth time, and black tarry fluid and one gallstone, soft and black and of the size of a cherry pit, were found in the gall bladder. A cholecystenterostomy was then performed and anastomosis with the colon completed. At last reports the button had not passed. The subsequent progress of the case is unknown to me. The gallstones in this case were like grains of gunpowder, and it was not to be expected that operative procedures would give much relief.

But this is an exceptional case, and it is a well-known fact that a simple cholecystostomy in a large majority of cases gives complete relief. The larger the stone, or stones, the greater the freedom from recurrences; the smaller the stones, the greater the liability to recurrences.

GANGRENE OF THE GALL BLADDER.

While it is a well-known fact that gallstones may lie in the gall bladder for years without giving rise to trouble, it is also well known that they will frequently produce a condition of inflammation of the gall bladder that may even suddenly eventuate in gangrene. I have met two cases of gangrene of the gall bladder.

CASE 2.—Dr. R., aged 62, was taken suddenly ill with severe pain in the abdomen. The bowels moved after the administration of a purgative. Temperature and pulse were elevated. Nausea. Some few years before he had had a severe attack of what was supposed to be typhoid fever, after which he suffered from terrible pains that were supposed to be due to indigestion. On examination of the abdomen fulness was felt below the edge of the liver. There was no rigidity of the right rectus muscle. Notwithstanding this fact the case was diagnosed as one of appendicitis. On opening the abdomen the appendix was found to be healthy. On looking further up a gangrenous gall bladder was seen snugly placed among inflamed intestines and omentum. The incision was enlarged, these adhesions were broken down readily, the gall bladder was opened and drained. The fluid evacuated was mucopurulent. Five gallstones were removed, one of them obstructing the cystic duct. A long glass drainage tube was placed to the bottom of Morison's pouch. Patient made an uninterrupted recovery.

CASE 3.—Mrs. W., who had a baby a month old, was taken suddenly ill early in the morning with severe pain in the abdomen. Her physician, Dr. T. B. Richardson, was sent for and he found her in great agony, and immediately administered a large dose of morphia. He was afraid that she would scarcely survive. Pulse was rapid and thready and the patient looked very ill. Improvement took place, but, later in the day, the pulse began to fail and he was again alarmed at her condition. I was sent for, but as I was out of town he decided to wait until the next day. In the morning the patient had somewhat improved. The temperature still remained high, having risen to 104 at the onset of the illness. She complained of one tender spot beneath the edge of the liver over the region of the gall bladder. There was slight puffing of the abdomen and vomiting. When I saw the patient the pulse was rapid and she was profoundly septic. A hard, tender, resistant spot could be made out over the region of the gall bladder, and I concluded that this must be another case of gangrene of the gall bladder. In order to share the responsibility I asked for another consultant before proceeding to operate. Very little hope was held out of the patient's recovery even with operation, owing to the septic condition. The abdomen was opened, the tense gall bladder was found, a large, green gangrenous patch involving at least one-third of its entire surface. The gall bladder contents were evacuated. The parts were too friable, swollen and thickened to permit of removal and on this account through-and-through drainage was established and the gall bladder area was packed off from the rest of the abdominal cavity by means of a large packing of iodoform gauze. During the convalescence it was necessary to again administer chloroform to remove the gauze, but the patient made an uninterrupted recovery. During the hurried manipulations, hurried owing to the patient's collapsed condition, no gallstone could be found.

It should be remembered that as the tender spot an inch and one-half from the anterior superior spine of the ilium towards the umbilicus points to appendicitis, so the tender spot an inch and one-half to the right and one inch and one-half above the umbilicus points to cholecystitis. Cholecystostomy was performed for the relief of this condition and was accompanied in the one case by gauze drainage and in the other by tube drainage with recovery in each. Gallstones do not necessarily produce such severe inflammation as to lead to gangrene.

EMPHYEMA OF THE GALL BLADDER WITH GALLSTONES.

The next condition of which I wish to speak is that of emphyema of the gall bladder. Inflammation has taken

place and pus has been formed. The patient may be very ill in the acute septic condition, or may be in fair health while the gall bladder may be filled with pus that is almost sterile, as it is found to be in other situations in which it has been retained for a considerable time.

It has been stated that it is necessary and wise in this condition, as well as in that of gangrene of the bladder, to remove the entire organ. I consider that this is too sweeping an assertion. It is not necessary to remove the gall bladder in cases in which it is inflamed and septic and thickened from chronic inflammation and filled with pus. After it has been drained for a time and the offending calculi have been removed, the organ soon resumes its normal condition. I have considered it advisable, under such circumstances, to carry out intermittent irrigation of the organ by means of a small catheter placed in the gall bladder and attached to a douche tin. It is, as a rule, easy to fasten such a gall bladder to the abdominal wall owing to the fact that it has been considerably distended. Suppuration may be found in a gall bladder containing a few or many stones and with or without complete obstruction of the cystic duct.

CHRONIC INFLAMMATION OF THE GALL BLADDER CONTAINING CALCULI BUT NO PUS.

In these cases it is usual to find the gall bladder thickened, adherent, contracted and sometimes sacculated. There is evidence that the patient has suffered from many attacks of inflammation. The operation of cholecystostomy may be a very difficult one to perform, under the circumstances. If such a gall bladder is put on the stretch and fastened to the edges of the parietal incision it is liable to tear away. If stitched up and dropped back after the stones have been removed, the stitches are liable to tear out and permit of leakage, as it frequently happens that there is a partial obstruction to the flow of bile through the common duct. The operation of cholecystectomy, under the circumstances, would be a very difficult procedure. If saccules are present it may be necessary to incise them individually and remove their contents and then to close the opening in a "sort of a way." Such closures can not be depended on to be water tight. I have treated such cases by passing a drainage tube into the gall bladder and stitching the

opening in the gall bladder firmly around the outer wall of the tube. None of the stitches go through the tube. Gauze packing is then placed around the tube and another drain is either put into the bottom of Morison's pouch or carried through a counter opening at its lowest point. The gauze is removed about the fifth day and the tube in the gall bladder is removed about the same time. If a counter opening has been made in the flank this is not allowed to close for a couple of weeks. These cases may be very successfully dealt with in this manner.

CHOLECYSTECTOMY.

When a stone becomes blocked in the cystic duct the bile remaining in the gall bladder is decolorized after a time and nothing will then be left but a clear mucoid fluid. The gall bladder may become thinner and may remain freely movable below the costal margin on the right side. While in this condition it may be so overdistended at any time as to become gangrenous, the gangrene usually beginning at its tip.

I operated on one such case where a sudden onset of pain and a tenderness on pressure over the gall bladder drew attention to the urgency of the condition. At the operation a very small gangrenous area could be made out at the end of the overdistended gall bladder. It is therefore advisable that all such cases should be operated on and the patient relieved from this source of danger.

The operation that should be performed, under the circumstances, is cholecystectomy; the entire gall bladder should be removed. This procedure can be carried out without difficulty. The tissues attached to the liver may be raised up with forceps and the finger can then be thrust into the layers of cellular tissue. Scissors will be required to cut through the peritoneum where it is dense. There is no hemorrhage to alarm the operator. The gall bladder is peeled off from the liver until the stone is reached; the duct is then further isolated beyond the stone and tied off with a fine silk ligature. Supporting sutures are placed over the end of the duct to bring peritoneum to peritoneum and act as an additional safeguard against a leak. It is wise to place a small strip of iodoform gauze down from the abdominal wound to the end of the cystic duct. Unless the operation of cholecystectomy is performed for this condition a

mucous fistula may persist, and this may require a second operation for its relief. This secondary operation is a difficult one to perform owing to the fact that strong adhesions are now present. I met with these difficulties in one case, and for a few days after the operation despaired of the patient's life.

All operators seem to be agreed that it is wise to perform the operation of cholecystectomy in all cases in which we have a much distended and atrophied gall bladder with an occluded cystic duct. On one occasion I left three stones lying side by side in the cystic duct after having removed a large number from the gall bladder by cholecystostomy. The stones passed on without difficulty and the patient made an uninterrupted recovery. At the present time I would not allow the patient to run any such risk, but would remove the gall bladder and the cystic duct with the stones *in situ*. It was interesting to note in this case that when one stone had entered the duct other smaller stones followed.

I removed a gall bladder two weeks ago with the stone in the cystic duct. The undilated duct could be seen beyond the stone. After looking at the enormous distension it was easy to understand how stricture of the duct may be produced after the removal of the foreign body. The patient from whom this was removed made an easy recovery and the operation only consumed a few minutes.

The other indications for cholecystectomy are at present being discussed by the surgical world. Many surgeons consider that the gall bladder should always be removed for the conditions above mentioned, namely, gangrene of the gall bladder, empyema of the gall bladder, chronic inflammation and thickening of the gall bladder with or without contraction, and for cystic enlargement of the gall bladder. Others consider that this is too radical a procedure; that it is not necessary nor advisable, and that it is undoubtedly accompanied by a greater mortality than the operation of cholecystostomy. I feel satisfied that there is a danger that the pendulum may again swing, as it ever swings in the surgical world, too far toward the radical side, but to come back again, no doubt, in the course of time.

Let us for an instant consider the two analogous conditions, gangrene of the gall bladder with one or more stones in its interior, and gangrene of the vermiform appendix with one or more coproliths in its in-

terior. Do we consider that it is always wise to remove a gangrenous appendix? Certainly not. There are times when we consider it wiser and safer to make our incision, to institute drainage and endeavor to isolate, with protecting gauze, the infected area. To dig down into and stir about these septic, infiltrated structures, under certain circumstances, is not good surgery. The same applies to the treatment of gangrenous conditions of the gall bladder. If, however, the organ can be readily removed and the tissues are not too friable to hold ligatures, it may be advisable to remove the offending organ, but, in my experience with two cases, the patient has not been in any condition to undergo such a prolonged operation.

Cholecystectomy does not produce a more radical cure than cholecystostomy. Even after cholecystectomy has been performed gallstones may form in the ducts in the liver itself and may be passed onward through them into the intestines. Owing to the fact that there is no cholecystitis to be encountered they are not large. I have seen, on one occasion, gallstones of medium size lying in a row in the hepatic duct above the junction of the hepatic and cystic ducts.

Langenbeck has denied that obstruction can result from stones forming in the biliary ducts outside of the gall bladder, but, as I have just said, I have seen such obstruction. The smallest stone in the row was nearest the liver. I was able to milk the stones down the hepatic duct and up from the common duct through the cystic duct into the gall bladder. The gall bladder had been opened and the gallstones were all removed in this manner.

The gall bladder is not known to be of any particular value and many animals are able to get along without it. It is occasionally found wanting in the human species. It has been said that the hemorrhagic condition of the mucous membrane of the gall bladder that is likely to occur as a post-operative complication after removal of gallstones, may be done away with by removal of the organ at the time of operation. Such hemorrhagic conditions are, however, rare. I have met with but one case, and at the postmortem examination it was found that the blood had come from a ruptured vessel in the liver, and, therefore, cholecystectomy would not have prevented death.

It has been stated as further argument in favor of cholecystectomy that by the removal of the gall bladder there is no danger of a recurrence of the cholecystitis, the disturbing element. I have not seen such disturbance occur after simple cholecystostomy and drainage if the stones have been thoroughly removed. It may always be desirable to remove the gall bladder for all the diseases to which it is liable, but the question to be answered is, is it always wise to do so?

In the presence of obstructive jaundice the operation of cholecystectomy is not advisable. The common duct being already obstructed it is desirable either to remove the stone and rely on the future patency of the duct for the relief of the patient, or to remove the stone and anastomose the gall bladder to the intestine, or to leave the stone in situ and perform cholecystenterostomy. It must be more difficult to anastomose the common duct itself than to anastomose the gall bladder to the intestine.

It has been stated that cholecystectomy should be considered as a curative operation, as it removes the cause of the disease. From what I have already stated I am satisfied that this is not so. Having seen large stones in the hepatic duct and in abscesses of the liver I am convinced that quite large stones may form outside of the gall bladder. There must, therefore, still be a danger of obstruction of the ducts even after the gall bladder has been removed. It would be interesting to ascertain whether the animals possessing no gall bladder suffer from gallstones.

A great deal has been said regarding the fistulae that are left after cholecystostomy. They are not comfortable, but are undoubtedly curative, and, in the large majority of cases, they close without trouble. The only fistula that is troublesome is the mucous fistula, and, as we have already decided that the gall bladder should be removed in the cases in which the mucous fistula is liable to form, this difficulty is done away with. The fistula that forms owing to the fact that the common duct is still obstructed is a useful one, for without it the patient must undoubtedly continue to suffer from jaundice, and if it persists after having fulfilled its offices it may be done away with by making an anastomosis when the patient is in a greatly improved condition. So that we see the discomfiture to the surgeon

and the discomfort of the patient have been blessings in disguise.

The formation of fistulæ teaches us that we should not use a large drainage tube for the purpose of draining the gall bladder. In this way the gall bladder opening can be reduced in size and the opening will close more quickly. Any suture used to fasten the gall bladder to the skin or the abdominal wound should be a continuous one, if non-absorbable, and it should be removed in a few days after operation. The drainage tube should be removed early except in cases of empyema of the gall bladder.

The argument that is used for the removal of the gall bladder in all cases owing to the fact that cancer is liable to supervene on gallstone irritation, is not based on a sure foundation. The surgeon does not propose to leave gallstones in the gall bladder to give rise to the irritation that is to lead up to the cancer, so that with or without a gall bladder this danger will be done away with.

The flow of bile into the gall bladder is greatest at night. It has never been demonstrated that patients from whom the gall bladder has been removed suffer in the slightest degree as a consequence of this fact.

CHOLECYSTENTEROSTOMY.

The operation of cholecystenterostomy can be performed by means of the elastic ligature or the Murphy button. I have used both and prefer the button. When the button is used care must be taken to allow long threads to float from the portion of the button placed in the intestine into the lumen of the gut. These silk threads become entangled in the fecal matter and the slight extra traction that is exerted has a tendency to draw the button toward the intestine and away from the gall bladder. I used the smallest sized Murphy button that I could buy and then had some very small ones, that I show here, made to order by Truax, Greene & Co. These have been used with perfect satisfaction to myself and to the patients.

After the bile has been diverted through the new channel the concretion impacted in the common duct grows smaller and disintegrates. I believe that it is quite possible that it may entirely disappear and that the bile may again proceed by the normal channel. The reverse of this is the case so long as the bile is

passing by the impacted calculus, owing to the fact that more bilirubin calcium is being precipitated on its surface until it may increase to a very great extent.

CHOLEDOCHOLITHECTOMY.

We have considered the treatment of stones in the gall bladder and in the cystic duct. We have now to turn our attention to the treatment of gallstones in the common or hepatic ducts. It is seldom that stones are met with in the hepatic duct. When they are met with they must be removed by pressing them down into the common duct, from which they may be removed by forcing them back through the cystic duct into the gall bladder, or they must be removed by direct incision. When a stone is lodged in the common duct it will be accompanied by an intermittent jaundice or a jaundice of varying intensity. The patient may be very deeply jaundiced for a great length of time.

The operation for the removal of the stone is in some cases fraught with such risk to the life and difficulty to the surgeon that it may be advisable to adopt another measure for the relief of the patient. An anastomosis between the gall bladder and intestine may be established. The colon is the portion of the bowel that can be most readily approximated to the gall bladder. Before this operation was carried out it was supposed that it was not advisable or, in other words, that the small intestine should be used instead. I have found that the patients do not have diarrhea as a consequence of the pouring of the bile into the large intestine or any digestive disturbances. When the small intestine is used it must be either drawn up over the colon or taken through the folds of its mesentery. I have anastomosed the gall bladder to the large intestine on several occasions with the most perfect results.

Owing to the advances that have been made in gall-bladder surgery cholecystenterostomy stands to-day in a different position. We can now incise ducts with impunity that can not, owing to their friability, be stitched, owing to the fact that we understand the safety given by careful and through drainage. The operation of cholecystenterostomy must now be recorded as rather a makeshift, only to be used when a patient is in a very bad condition.

On one occasion, when operating on a young woman,

I found that she already had an anastomotic opening between the gall bladder and intestine that had been produced by the bursting of an inflamed gall bladder into the bowel.

It has been stated that the relations of the hepatic artery, the portal vein and the common duct may be changed and one of the vessels may run across the duct. If the positions of these important structures are altered the removal of a stone from the common bile duct is surrounded by a new and terrible danger. The condition might be detected during operation by a careful preliminary examination of the parts. Even when the structures are normally placed the operation is a difficult one. Much assistance can be attained by a forceps that I have had made by Stevens & Sons of Toronto. It is intended to replace the fingers of the left hand, to grasp the duct containing the stone and to draw it forwards to be within easier reach and away from the important structures beneath it.

The difficulty of the operation varies with the construction of the patient. It is more difficult to perform the operation on a patient with deep ribs than on one with short ribs. In all cases a large sandbag placed under the back and the transverse oblique incision should be employed, taking care to keep the incision well down below the hepatic margin. The liver can then be pulled upwards and the stomach inwards and downwards and the colon downwards so that the field of operation may be brought well into view. It is always advisable to pack in sponges to drag down the stomach and intestines and to protect the general peritoneal cavity from infection. I find that this dragging down of the stomach is of great assistance.

If the forceps I have mentioned are not used the duct must be held forwards with the thumb and index finger or the first two fingers of the left hand. With the duct held down either by the fingers or the rollers of the forceps the operator must decide on the length of the incision into the duct that will be necessary for the removal of a stone. A large stone may be crushed and the debris can be removed with a small scoop. When the length of the incision into the duct has been decided on a purse-string suture should be placed beyond its limits, the incision must then be made in the center of the oval formed by the running suture. The stone

having been removed and a probe having been passed through the common duct into the intestine the purse-string suture is drawn and tied and any further escape of bile over the field of operation is prevented. A supporting row of mattress sutures should now be placed to more securely close the opening into the duct. Before closing the abdomen it will be wise to place a small gauze drain down to the duct and to drain Morison's pouch by a single drainage tube from the front or by through-and-through drainage.

As I have said before, the intestine should not be opened for the purpose of removing a stone from the common bile duct. Such a procedure is not necessary according to the light of our more recent experience. It may happen that a malignant growth, a so-called cylindroma, obstructing the common bile duct is mistaken for an impacted gallstone. I have met with such a case in my own practice and have seen two similar cases in the practice of others. Under such circumstances the jaundice usually comes on suddenly without pain; it may be intermittent. A rounded mass will be felt after the abdomen has been opened that can only be differentiated from stone by means of a needle passed through the wall of the duct into the mass, or by means of the passage of a probe or a pair of forceps through an incision into the duct. Owing to its gritty nature a gallstone can be easily distinguished from a neoplasm. These growths are always rounded and not faceted and frequently move back and forth in the duct through a small space.

It is scarcely necessary for me to enter into a description of more than general details of these operations to such an audience. We all know that these operations can not be carried out successfully unless proper precautions are taken to prevent contamination of the peritoneal cavity. Sponges, absolutely sterile and plenty of them, must be made use of so that during the performance of the work all the intestines, except a portion of the colon and the stomach, are kept out of view. Sponges soiled with bile or gall-bladder mucus must be discarded and not used again during the performance of the operation.

And now, in conclusion, let me say that there are two great surgical principles involved in this work; firstly, thorough asepsis and thorough protection against the

infection of any of the surrounding tissues; and, secondly, thorough and efficient drainage. If these two principles are kept in mind the operator can sacrifice thoroughness in his work for the sake of the benefit of haste to his patient. Many of these patients do not withstand the shock of a prolonged operation and the length of time occupied is of great importance. In the pelvis we have been endeavoring to do away with drainage while in this region we provide the most thorough drainage. The conditions are different.