

AMPUTATION OF THE THIGH.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR—As the medical profession at this moment must feel deeply interested in the late discovery made by our Transatlantic friends, of the inhalation of ether producing that state of narcotism which renders persons insensible to the pain arising from surgical operations, I offer no apology for sending you the following brief account of an experiment, as to its effect, which came under my own observation yesterday. My partner, Mr. Coleman, having occasion to perform amputation of the thigh upon a, young woman of a highly nervous temperament, and who dreaded the pain of the operation exceedingly, we deemed it a favourable opportunity to test the efficacy of this new discovery. By the kind assistance of Mr. Julian, a talented young chemist, we prepared the necessary apparatus to conduct the experiment. The patient being brought to the edge of the bed, the tourniquet applied, and everything prepared to commence amputation, she began to inhale the ether, which produced a good deal of coughing, and it was with some difficulty we prevailed upon her to persevere, which she at length did,—not, however, in a very satisfactory manner, drawing only short inspirations, and then removing the tube from her month. After using it for the space of three or four minutes, her teeth became fixed, her eyes closed, and she sank back into the arms of an attendant, as if in a state of complete intoxication. Mr. Coleman now seized this favourable moment, and very adroitly and expeditiously performed the flap operation. The patient struggled with her hands, and cried out for her mother, (who had been dead some years.) The sound limb was not held, nor did she move it, but frequently said “she would not have her leg cut off then ;” indeed, it was quite evident she was not aware of the operation having been performed; for after the stump was dressed, and she was comfortably placed in bed, she said “it was not off, for her foot was asleep,” and begged of some of us to rub it. On inquiring of her, some hours after the operation, what she had felt, she said “she thought she had been in a dream, and that we had hurt her leg, to see if she could bear the operation, which was to be performed the next day.” She had no recollection of any cutting pain, nor could she tell the kind of pain she had suffered, but, thought she remembered “hearing the bone sawed.”

The narcotic effect of the ether soon subsided; for in putting in some sutures, to bring the edges of the stump together, the passing of the needle through the skin produced cries of the most agonizing pain, though her mind was not sufficiently restored to consciousness to be aware of what was going on.

The result of this trial I cannot but think highly encouraging, and fully believe, that if the inhalation had been more perfectly accomplished, the state of insensibility would have been most complete. So satisfied am I that we now possess a means of narcotizing pain, that I shall not hesitate to adopt it in any case where a painful surgical operation has to be undergone, taking care, in future, to render my patient thoroughly conversant with the mechanical process of inhalation, previously to the use of the ether.

—I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

GEORGE EDWARDS.

Wolverhampton, Jan. 1847.

PS. Jan. 3rd — Our patient is going on very favourably, and still persists she had a dream during the operation.

Wolverhampton Was Third In Field Of Painless Surgery

THE 18-year-old girl struggled into a sitting posture. "I won't have it off, I won't have my leg off," she screamed, in a throaty, muffled voice.

Kind hands pressed her back on the bed, and she was reassured that indeed her leg was off, and that she had not felt the operation.

That was on January 1st, 1847, one hundred years ago this week, and the first surgical operation under an anaesthetic ever performed in Wolverhampton had just been completed.

THE SURGEON

Yes, to Wolverhampton belongs the honour of being the scene of the third "painless surgical operation" performed in England, and to Mr. A. H. Coleman, grandfather of Dr. Coleman, of Tettenhall-road, Wolverhampton, belongs the honour of being the surgeon to carry out that operation.

Through the courtesy of Dr. Coleman I was today able to see a copy of the letter sent to the *Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal* in January, 1847, describing the operation.

The letter, which was sent to that journal by Mr. George Edwards, a partner of Mr. Coleman, gives a vivid description of this milestone in the medical history of Wolverhampton.

DREADED PAIN

It ends: ". . . . My partner, Dr. Coleman, having occasion to perform amputation of the thigh upon a young woman of highly nervous temperament, and who dreaded the pain of the operation exceedingly, we deemed it a favourable opportunity to test the efficacy of the new discovery" — the new discovery being sulphuric ether, which had already been used by a Boston dentist and also for two operations in England just previously, one in London on December 22nd and the other in Bristol on December 29th.

"The patient being brought to the edge of the bed," continues the letter, "and everything prepared to commence amputation, she began to inhale the ether, which produced a good deal of coughing, and it was with some difficulty that we prevailed upon her to persevere"

"After using it for a space of three or four minutes her limbs became fixed, her eyes closed and she sank back in the arms of an attendant as if in a state of complete intoxication. Mr. Coleman now seized this favourable moment and very adroitly and expeditiously performed the flap operation.

CRIED FOR MOTHER

"The patient struggled with her hands and cried out for her mother (who had been dead some years). The sound limb was not held, nor did she move it, but frequently said 'she would not have her leg cut off then'; indeed, it was quite evident she was not aware of the operation being performed, for after the stump was dressed and she was comfortably placed in bed she said 'it was not off, for her foot was asleep,' and she begged someone to rub it.

"On inquiring of her some hours



DR. A. H. COLEMAN

after the operation what she had felt, she said 'she thought she had been in a dream and that we hurt her leg, to see if she could bear the operation, which was to be performed the next day.'

"She had no recollection of any cutting pain, nor could she tell the kind of pain she suffered, but thought she remembered hearing 'the bone sawed.'

"The narcotic effect of the ether soon subsided, for in putting in some sutures to bring the edges of the stump together the passing of the needle through the skin produced the most agonising pain, though her mind was not sufficiently restored to consciousness to be aware of what was going on."

MADE PROGRESS

This letter was dated January 2nd, 1847, the day after the operation had been performed, and in postscript to the letter added on January 3rd, it is noted that the patient was still progressing favourably and still persisted she had a dream during the operation.

And such was the first operation under anaesthetic in Wolverhampton. A hundred years later it is a commonplace. From the small hospital in Cleveland-road where was performed this operation has grown The Royal Hospital, Wolverhampton, with its hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of surgical instruments and apparatus.

But to the pioneers of 100 years ago—a very humble and heartfelt "thank you" for the endless pain they have saved the thousands who followed.

J. E. S.

Dutch Greetings To Wolverhampton

Greetings for the New Year by telegram from two towns in Holland were conveyed to about 150 members and friends of the Wolverhampton branch of the International Friendship League at the New Year dance at The Silver Slipper ballroom, Wolverhampton, last night.

The messages were from the international conference of the I.F.L. at Amsterdam and from members of the I.F.L. at Arnhem.

Among those present last night were a party of Dutch soldiers from Wrothesley.