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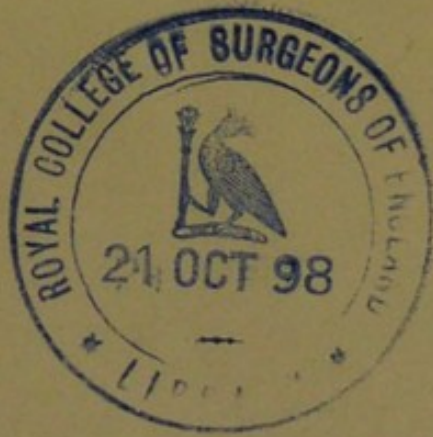
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A FATAL CASE OF ACUTE ARSENICAL
POISONING.

By T. N. KELYNACK, M.D., M.R.C.P.

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A FATAL CASE OF ACUTE ARSENICAL POISONING.

By T. N. KELYNACK, M.D., M.R.C.P., *Pathologist, Manchester Royal Infirmary, etc.*

(PLATE IV.)

As, in consequence of restrictive legislation, acute arsenical poisoning has become comparatively rare in recent years, the following striking case may not be without interest:—

Reuben P., æt. 63, a fried-fish shopkeeper, and his wife Mary, were admitted to the Manchester Royal Infirmary on 12th May, presenting symptoms of acute arsenical poisoning.

Clinical history.—The patients had recently experienced financial difficulties, and rather than face poverty they agreed to die. The agent chosen was "white arsenic," of which they had a quantity in the house, half a pound having been given them about three years previously by a chemist friend, for the purpose of killing rats. Half a teaspoonful was the dose said to have been taken. The wife took her portion at about 2 P.M., and the husband about 3 P.M. They were found at 6 P.M. The woman appeared to be very ill, but when asked

what was the matter, stated that she was all right. The man, who was also in a very serious condition, stated that they had taken arsenic. Emetics were administered, and milk and white-of-egg given. The patients were then brought to the Infirmary, and admitted at 11 P.M. The man was in a very collapsed condition, but complained of little pain. The stomach was washed out, dialysed iron administered, and stimulants given, but death occurred at 3.15 A.M. the following morning. The woman recovered, and was able to attend the coroner's inquiry on the 16th, when the jury found that there had been no agreement to commit suicide, and that the deceased poisoned himself whilst temporary insane.

Autopsy.—The body was that of an old man. The stomach was small, contracted, and contained a quantity of semi-digested milk having a sour odour. The anterior and posterior walls were most involved, the lesser curvature and pyloric region being least affected. The mucous membrane was thickened, swollen, wrinkled, or corrugated, somewhat resembling coarse velvet pile. There were numerous areas of red and dark brown hæmorrhagic exudation. Several irregular flakes of membranous lymph had a semi-transparent dirty white appearance, much resembling damp tissue-paper. There was no actual ulceration, and no perforation. The duodenum and intestines were congested, but free from corrosion. The tongue and œsophagus seemed normal. The brain and membranes were much congested and œdematous, with considerable serous effusion into the ventricles. The lungs were slightly congested and œdematous. The other organs presented no features of importance.

A sample of the powder used as the poisonous agent was examined by Dr. Alan M'Dougall, the resident medical officer of the Royal Infirmary, and found to be arsenic. The lesions in the stomach are shown in Plate IV., from a photograph taken by my brother, Mr. W. S. Kelynack.

The case presented many features of pathological and medico-legal interest.

In the first place, as was pointed out at the coroner's inquiry, if two persons agree to commit suicide together, and one only dies, the survivor is guilty of wilful murder. Fortunately, in the present case the jury took a merciful view, and no proceedings were taken against the woman.

Although from the history both took a similar dose, one recovered rapidly, the other dying in a few hours.

In the fatal case, the evidences were curiously limited to the stomach. Generally, the intestines seem to show involvement. Professor Dixon Mann says: "The duodenum generally participates in the appearance presented by the stomach."¹

The stomach has been added to the pathological collection of the Owens College.²

¹ Mann's "Forensic Medicine and Toxicology," London, 1898, p. 452.

² The number of specimens in English museums showing the characteristic lesions of acute arsenical poisoning, is very small. For references to preparations in metropolitan hospitals, see Blyth's "Poisons, their Effects and Detection," London, 1895, p. 550.



Stomach showing characteristic lesions of acute arsenical poisoning.

