

BRITISH SURGICAL
PRACTICE

VOLUME 7

BRITISH SURGICAL PRACTICE

Under the General Editorship of

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGES
PHARYNGEAL DIVERTICULA — — —	1-8
PHYSIOTHERAPY — — — — —	9-19
PHYSIQUE, BODY BUILD AND POSTURE	20-34
PITUITARY TUMOURS — — — —	35-49
PLASTIC SURGERY—CORNEAL GRAFTING	50-54
PLEURA—DISEASES OF — — — —	55-93
POLIOMYELITIS — — — — —	94-102
POLYCYSTIC DISEASE — — — —	103-107
POST-OPERATIVE GANGRENE — — —	108-115
PREGNANCY—SURGICAL INTERVENTION DURING — — — — —	116-132
PROSTATE — — — — —	133-176
PROTRACTED ILLNESS—MANAGEMENT AND REHABILITATION — — — —	177-184
PULMONARY ABSCESS — — — —	185-196
PULMONARY TUBERCULOSIS — — —	197-240
PYLEPHLEBITIS — — — — —	241-245
PYLORIC STENOSIS OF INFANTS — —	246-255
RABIES — — — — —	256-261
RADIO-ACTIVE ISOTOPES — — — —	262-267
RADIOTHERAPY — — — — —	268-297

	PAGES
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE EAR AND NOSE	298-318
RECTUM—BENIGN TUMOURS OF — —	319-324
RECTUM—CARCINOMA OF — — —	325-342
RECTUM—HAEMORRHOIDS — — —	343-367
RECTUM—PROCTITIS — — — — —	368-372
RECTUM—PROLAPSE — — — — —	373-387
REFRIGERATION ANAESTHESIA — —	388-395
RESUSCITATION — — — — —	396-406
RETINA — — — — —	407-416
SACRO-COCCYGEAL REGION—SURGERY OF — — — — —	417-429
SALIVARY GLANDS — — — — —	430-453
SCALP AND SKULL — — — — —	454-472
SCHISTOSOMIASIS — — — — —	473-487
SCIATICA — — — — —	488-505
SCLERA — — — — —	506-509
SCURVY—MASKED AND MANIFEST —	510-519
SKIN—DISEASES OF, IN RELATION TO SURGERY — — — — —	520-534
SPEECH THERAPY — — — — —	535-538
SPINAL COLUMN — — — — —	539-571
SPINAL CORD — — — — —	572-591

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGS.	PAGES
1. Pharyngeal pouch—lateral and antero-posterior views — —	1
2. Dissection of pharyngeal pouch—lateral view — —	2
3-4. Large pharyngeal pouch containing food which was regarded as an intrathoracic goitre — — — —	4
5. Stages in operation for excision of pharyngeal pouch — —	7
6. Showing extremes of Sheldon's types in females — —	22
7. Illustrating "forward carriage" and "backward carriage". (a) Method of measuring depth of lumbar concavity; (b) method of measuring depth of lumbo-thoraco-cervical convexity — —	28
8. Pituitary tumour—perimetry charts showing left homonymous defect due to involvement of right optic tract — —	39
9. Skiagram of same patient as in Fig. 8 showing complete destruction of pituitary fossa and disappearance of one clinoid process	39
10. Pituitary tumour, (a) and (b) Perimetry charts showing visual defects before and after operation; (c) and (d) diagrammatic representations of extension of visual defects — —	40
11. Case of pituitary tumour confirmed by skiagram showing enlargement of sella turcica — — — —	42
12. Typical radiographic appearances in chromophobe adenoma —	42
13. Skiagram showing calcification in a suprasellar tumour with moderate enlargement of sella — — — —	43
14. Skiagram demonstrating chronically raised intracranial pressure	43
15. Ventriculogram of same patient as in Fig. 14 — —	44
16. Diagrams of transfrontal operation for pituitary tumour showing types of scalp incision and form of the osteoplastic flap —	47
17. Corneal grafting. Diagrammatic section through cornea and graft to illustrate shelving margins of graft and of hole in recipient cornea — — — —	52
18. Diagram to illustrate arrangement of sutures in corneal grafting	53
19. Open pneumothorax. Diagrams illustrating changes occurring during inspiration and expiration — — — —	57
20. Diagrams showing effects of closed pneumothorax and tension or pressure pneumothorax — — — —	58
21. Tension pneumothorax on right side with displacement of mediastinum to the left — — — —	58
22. Simple form of non-return valve for treatment of tension pneumothorax — — — —	59
23. Haemothorax of moderate size resulting from penetrating wound of left chest — — — —	62
24. Chronic empyema with "egg-shell" calcification of walls —	65

FIGS.	PAGES
25. Total empyema (pyothorax) — — — — —	66
26. Encysted empyema — — — — —	66
27. Diagrams illustrating open and closed pleural drainage —	68
28. Intercostal drainage. (a) Trocar and cannula introduced through an intercostal space. (b) Self-retaining Malecot catheter on introducer passed through the cannula — — —	69
29. Position for aspiration of pleural cavity — — —	72
30. Stages in operation for rib resection and wide-tube drainage	74-75
31. Apparatus for closed drainage — — — —	76
32. Lateral pleurogram showing tendency to "bottle-neck" formation during healing of empyema cavity — — — —	76
33. Pleurograms showing empyema approaching final healing —	77
34. Encysted pleural effusion (purulent) — — — —	77
35. Residual pleural pocket resulting from slow expansion at apex	78
36. Diagrams illustrating breathing exercises with localized inspiratory effort — — — — —	79
37. Chronic empyema of many years' standing showing gross postural deformity — — — — —	81
38. Stages in operation for decortication of lung — — —	83
39. Stage in operation for persistent chronic empyema —	84
40. Large left-sided pleural effusion of tuberculous origin — —	86
41. Total thoracoplasty to show extent of collapse obtained by a multiple-stage operation — — — — —	90
42-43. Muscle charts used to determine site and degree of lower and upper limb paralysis — — — — —	97-98
44. Patient in a Both respirator or "iron lung" — — — —	99
45. Paul-Bragg respirator — — — — —	100
46. Skin following an empyema, in a patient with massive spreading gangrene — — — — —	111
47. Rupture of uterus through an old Caesarean section scar —	119
48. Retroverted gravid uterus — — — — —	129
49. Calcified tuberculous prostate and seminal vesicles — —	135
50. Calculous prostatitis — — — — —	135
51. Section of prostate above verumontanum showing glandular nodules in lateral lobes and compression of posterior lobe —	138
52. Tri-lobe enlargement of prostate with unequal lateral lobes —	138
53. Tri-lobe enlargement of prostate—common type — —	139
54. Middle-lobe enlargement of prostate — — — —	139
55. Jack stone and smaller stone removed during prostatectomy —	141
56. Low suprapubic cystostomy — — — — —	144
57. Suprapubic catheterization — — — — —	145

FIGS.	PAGES
58. Pulmonary metastases from carcinoma of prostate — —	147
59. Osteoblastic metastases in pelvis and spine from carcinoma of prostate — — — — —	148
60. Pigmentation of abdominal scar and enlargement of breasts during treatment with stilboestrol — — — — —	149
61. Fibrous prostate — — — — —	150
62. Prostatic filling defect in base of bladder shown on excretion urography — — — — —	153
63. Morson's suprapubic trocar and cannula — — —	159
64. Kidd's suprapubic trocar and cannula — — —	159
65. Hamilton Bailey's suprapubic catheter introducer — — —	159
66. Riches suprapubic catheter introducer — — —	160
67. Catheter fixed on Riches introducer — — —	160
68. Suprapubic catheterization showing angle of introducer with abdominal wall — — — — —	160
69. Advancer for adjusting position of suprapubic catheter —	160
70. Specimen after suprapubic catheterization — — —	161
71. McCarthy visual prostatic electrotome — — —	161
72. Prostatic needle for injection of adrenaline — — —	162
73. Foley haemostatic catheter with 30-millilitre balloon — — —	162
74. Riches glass and metal bladder syringe — — —	162
75. Gershom Thompson prostatic punch — — —	163
76. Morson's illuminated bladder retractor — — —	164
77. (a) Blunt boomerang needle ; (b) ligature carrier — — —	165
78. Stages in retropubic prostatectomy — — —	166-167
79. Showing site of pre-vesical drain and method of anchoring catheter in retropubic prostatectomy — — —	168
80. Osteitis pubis — — — — —	172
81. Urethrogram showing post-prostatectomy shelf formation and obstruction — — — — —	173
82. Mushroom stone in prostatic cavity and bladder — — —	174
83. Lower limbs of female aged 78 years showing condition after prolonged period in bed with tight bed-clothing — — —	179
84. Lower limbs of male aged 74 years showing condition after prolonged period in bed following fracture of femur — — —	182
85. Diagrams to show broncho-pulmonary segments and bronchi supplying them — — — — —	188
86. Diagrams to show various stages of lung abscess formation — — —	189
87. Diagrams to show peripheral segmental nature of lung abscess — — —	190
88. Successive stages in external drainage of lung abscess — — —	194

FIGS.	PAGES
89. Diaphragmatic paralysis—skiagrams before and after phrenic crush — — — — —	203
90. Pulmonary tuberculosis—skiagram showing reactivation of lesion in case first treated eight years previously — — —	207
91. Skiagram of case shown in Fig. 90, three years later — —	207
92-94. Case of pulmonary tuberculosis. Skiagrams taken before and after thoracoplasty — — — — —	210-211
95. Incision for thoracoplasty — — — — —	213
96-101. Stages in thoracoplasty — — — — —	214-217
102-119. Skiagrams of five cases of pulmonary tuberculosis, before and after thoracoplasty — — — — —	218-233
120. Skiagram showing circumscribed shadow at apex of right lung —	235
121. Tomograph of case shown in Fig. 120 — — — —	235
122. Same case as that shown in Fig. 120. Section of lobe, after right upper lobectomy, revealing tuberculoma — — —	236
123. Skiagram of same case as that shown in Fig. 120, four years after right upper lobectomy — — — —	236
124. Skiagram showing pre-operative state of case of pulmonary tuberculosis — — — — —	237
125. Tomograph of case shown in Fig. 124, demonstrating excavation of lobes of left lung — — — — —	237
126. Skiagram of case shown in Fig. 124, after lateral thoracoplasty —	238
127. Same case as that shown in Fig. 124. Cut surface of resected lung	238
128. Liver specimen from case of syphilitic cirrhosis and portal vein thrombosis — — — — —	242
129. Portion of right lobe of liver in case of advanced portal sup- puration — — — — —	243
130. Liver of child showing irregular areas of inspissated bile salts, the late result of portal pyaemia — — — — —	245
131. Specimen showing essential features of pyloric stenosis —	246
132. Curve showing incidence of pyloric hypertrophy in infants divided into groups according to age — — — —	247
133. Case of pyloric stenosis, showing peristaltic wave — —	248
134. Method of palpation of the pylorus — — — —	249
135-138. Showing line of incision and stages in Rammstedt operation for pyloric section — — — — —	252-253
139. Negri bodies in the hippocampus major of a rabid dog —	258
140. Thigh wounds in fatal case of rabies — — — —	259
141. Facial wounds in case of rabies which responded to treatment —	260
142. 220-kV. Victor x-ray therapy tube — — — —	269
143. Lawrence's 60-inch, 220-ton cyclotron — — — —	270
144. 100-million-volt betatron — — — — —	271

FIGS.	PAGES
145. (a) 60-kV. short-distance low-voltage x-ray therapy apparatus ; (b) 60-140-kV. Victor x-ray therapy apparatus — — —	272
146. (a) 200-kV. Watson x-ray therapy apparatus ; (b) 400-kV. Victor x-ray therapy apparatus — — — —	273
147. (a) One-million-volt x-ray therapy apparatus ; (b) two-million- volt x-ray therapy apparatus — — — —	274
148. (a) Radium containers for intracavitary treatment ; (b) radium capsules, tubes and boxes in the uterus and vagina — —	275
149. Ten-gramme teleradium unit — — — —	276
150. Use of maternal ear cartilage in repair of congenital loss of external ear — — — —	301
151-152. Diagrams showing principles of repair and reconstruction of ear — — — —	302-303
153-156. Reconstruction for traumatic loss of ear — —	304-305
157. Reduction of old broken nose — — — —	307
158. Schematic representation of operative stages in reduction of nasal deformity — — — —	308-309
159. Repair of alar defect by composite ear graft — —	310
160. Diagrams showing stages of total nasal reconstruction by fore- head flap — — — —	312
161-162. Total nasal reconstruction by forehead flap, using local inturned flaps for lining—pre-operative and post-operative conditions — — — —	313-314
163. Total nasal reconstruction by forehead flap using tube pedicle tissue for lining—pre-operative condition — —	315
164. Diagrams showing stages in total nasal reconstruction by fore- head flap using tube pedicle tissue for lining — —	316
165-167. Total nasal reconstruction by forehead flap using tube pedicle tissue for lining—pre-operative and post-operative conditions —	317
168. Patient in lithotomy-Trendelenburg position, showing special leg supports and sacral rest — — — —	329
169. Perineal view of lithotomy-Trendelenburg position — —	329
170-179. Carcinoma of the rectum—stages in synchronous combined excision — — — —	330-335
180. Intra-pelvic restorative resection—diagram illustrating method of division of sigmoid arteries — — — —	337
181. Abdomino-anal resection—diagrams showing method of anasto- mosis and drainage of pre-sacral space — —	338
182. (a) Distended external haemorrhoids ; (b) prolapsed internal haemorrhoids — — — —	344
183. Rectum and anal canal opened from behind, showing coverings of three parts of anterior pile — — — —	345

FIGS.	PAGES
184. Diagram to show the three parts of a pile and prolapse of a pile	345
185. Dissection to show attachment of longitudinal muscle to skin of anal canal at junction of internal haemorrhoid and external haemorrhoid — — — — —	346
186. Prolapsed thrombosed intero-external left lateral haemorrhoid —	347
187. Prolapsed third-degree anterior pile — — — —	347
188. Dissection to show subcutaneous external sphincter ani and its superficial relations — — — — —	348
189. Diagrammatic representation of arterial supply to haemorrhoids	349
190. Planned rectal case sheet — — — — —	352
191. External haemorrhoids showing distension, eversion and prolapse on straining — — — — —	353
192. Proctoscope and light — — — — —	354
193. Diagram to show plan of operation for haemorrhoids — —	355
194–199. Stages in operation for removal of haemorrhoids —	356–359
200. Diagram to show site of injection for treatment of haemorrhoids —	363
201. Complete prolapse in a female — — — —	375
202. Complete uterine and rectal prolapse — — — —	376
203. Complete rectal prolapse showing circular folds of mucosa —	377
204. Unilateral prolapse—diagram illustrating Goodsall's ligature with two needles — — — — —	380
205–217. Stages in recto-sigmoidectomy — — — —	381–385
218. Recto-sigmoidectomy specimens: (a) average; (b) extreme —	385
219–223. Technique of refrigeration anaesthesia — —	390–392
224–227. Stages in operation for detachment of the retina — —	412
228. Embryonic development—longitudinal section of embryo in third week — — — — —	418
229. Dorsal surface of embryo at end of third week — —	418
230. Diagrammatic cross section of embryo to show formation of notochord — — — — —	418
231. Multiple primary sacro-coccygeal sinuses — — —	420
232. Single primary sacro-coccygeal sinuses with secondary sinus on left side — — — — —	421
233. Method of retracting buttocks in treatment of sacro-coccygeal sinus — — — — —	422
234. Diagrams showing areas of skin to be removed in treatment of various forms of sacro-coccygeal sinus — — —	423
235–236. Showing method of placing sutures and arrangement of dressings after excision of sacro-coccygeal sinus —	423–424
237. Section of chordoma from sacrum showing vacuolated cells —	427
238. Acute suppurative parotitis — — — —	433
239. Acute parotitis and subcutaneous abscess — — —	433

FIGS.	PAGES
240. Lilienthal's incisions in operative treatment of acute parotitis —	434
241. Bilateral recurrent parotitis — — — — —	435
242. Cells found in catheter specimen of saliva during quiescent stage of acute parotitis — — — — —	435
243. Sialograms : (a) normal; (b) in recurrent parotitis, showing globular dilatations — — — — —	436
244. Sialograms in recurrent parotitis — — — — —	437
245. Left submaxillary sialogram from case of recurrent infection involving all glands — — — — —	438
246. Chronic parotitis showing calcification of parotids — —	439
247. Chronic parotitis showing left parotid calculus — —	440
248. Healed parotid fistula — — — — —	442
249. Submaxillary duct calculus — — — — —	445
250. Large calculus in posterior third of submaxillary duct — —	445
251. Photomicrograph of mixed parotid tumour — —	448
252. Mixed parotid tumour — — — — —	448
253. Facial paralysis caused by malignant parotid tumour — —	450
254. Malignant parotid tumour — — — — —	451
255. Ruptured ulcerating aneurysm following penetrating wound, cured by division and ligation of superficial temporal artery —	455
256. Gummatous ulceration of forehead and cheek — —	456
257. Potts' puffy tumour—osteomyelitis of skull due to dart wound —	457
258. Skiagrams illustrating osteomyelitis, (a) in relation to frontal air sinus, and (b) spreading over the whole calvarium by direct contiguity — — — — —	458
259. Skiagram of patient shown in Fig. 257 showing osteomyelitic spread by diploic channels — — — — —	459
260. Sclerosis of occipito-parietal region in relation to chronic extradural collection of pus — — — — —	459
261. Turban tumour of 30 years' duration before, during and after treatment — — — — —	461
262. Large pachydermatocele obliterating the features — —	463
263. Sessile ivory osteoma of mastoid region — —	463
264. Frontal osteoma : (a) diagram showing pre-operative condition; (b) patient after operation — — — — —	464
265. Skiagram showing perforation and disruption of skull wall by sarcomatous meningioma — — — — —	465
266. Plastic repair of scalp — — — — —	467-468
267-268. Material and tools for repair of skull with tantalum —	470
269. Map showing regional distribution of schistosoma — —	474
270. Diagram showing life cycle of schistosomes — —	475
271. Bather's itch — — — — —	476
272. Bladder and ureters outlined by schistosome infestation —	479

FIGS.	PAGES
273. Extraperitoneal exposure of both ureters — — —	484
274. Exercise for strengthening perineal and levator muscles —	485
275. Fixation of the rectum in treatment of schistosomiasis — —	486
276. Coronal section of fifth lumbar disc showing rupture of annulus fibrosus and protrusion of nucleus pulposus — — —	489
277. (a) Appearance of first sacral root displaced backward by disc protrusion; (b) root and theca retracted to show disc protrusion	490
278. Rigid lumbar kypho-scoliosis in patient with lesion of fourth lumbar disc — — — — — — —	492
279. Persisting lordosis in flexion of trunk in case of lumbo-sacral disc protrusion — — — — — — —	492
280. Diagram of neurological abnormalities — — —	493
281. Myelogram of lumbo-sacral disc protrusion showing occlusion of root sheath and indentation of theca — — —	496
282. Antero-posterior and lateral myelograms in a case of protrusion of fourth lumbar disc causing cauda equina paralysis — —	496
283. Usual exposure for lesions of fourth and fifth lumbar discs —	500
284. Watson-Cheyne probe and small pituitary rongeurs — —	501
285. (a) Window exposure of lesion of fifth lumbar disc by simple excision of ligamentum flavum; (b) fragment of ligamentum flavum and two disc fragments; (c) post-operative skiagram showing bony integrity of lumbar spine — — — —	502
286. Muscle chart for detached retina — — —	507
287. Photostat reproduction from p. 102 of <i>A Voyage Round the World</i>	511
288. Costochondral junctions in normal and in scorbutic guinea-pigs	511
289. Healed abdominal incisions in normal and in subscorbutic guinea-pigs — — — — — — —	512
290. Sections of healed abdominal incisions in normal and in subscorbutic guinea-pigs — — — — — — —	513
291. Microphotographs showing low-power views of scar tissue in normal and in subscorbutic guinea-pigs — — —	514
292. Microphotographs showing high-power views of scar tissue in normal and in subscorbutic guinea-pigs — — —	515
293. Healed gastrotomy wounds in normal and in subscorbutic guinea-pigs — — — — — — —	516
294. Sections of abdominal skin incisions obtained at necropsy on human subjects dying (a) 12 days after operation, and (b) 13 days after operation — — — — — — —	517
295. Sensitization dermatitis caused by zinc oxide strapping —	523
296. (a) Sulphonamide dermatitis caused by the application of sulphonamide powder to an abrasion on the thumb; (b) eczematous eruption on face of same patient — — — —	524
297. Pyogenic granuloma on back of scalp following abrasion from comb — — — — — — —	531
298. Skiagram showing typical paravertebral abscess — —	540
299. Jones straight frame with head-piece for mid-dorsal tuberculosis	543

FIGS.	PAGES
300. Jones posterior spinal support with collar, for tuberculosis of mid-dorsal and upper dorsal vertebrae — — — —	544
301. Jones posterior spinal support fitted with patient lying — —	544
302–303. Congenital scoliosis — — — —	548–549
304. Cervical and upper dorsal spina bifida with associated scoliosis —	549
305. Idiopathic scoliosis showing extent of primary curve — —	550
306. Risser jacket for lower dorsal and upper lumbar scoliosis —	554
307. Fusion of spine by twin grafts — — — —	556
308. Manipulative reduction by halter traction — — — —	563
309. Traction applied to occipital region by Crile's method — —	563
310. Apparatus for skull traction — — — —	563
311. Crutchfield skull traction apparatus applied — — — —	564
312. Patient with dislocation of C.5 on C.6, treated by skeletal traction and open reduction and fixation with figure-of-eight stainless steel wire — — — — —	565
313. Crush fracture of C.5 treated by spinal fusion — — — —	566
314. Spontaneous dislocation of atlas following attack of tonsillitis —	567
315. Extension injury to axis showing fracture of vertebral arch —	567
316. Extension injury showing fracture of odontoid process with some backward displacement — — — — —	567
317. Spondylolisthesis due to congenital defect in the laminae —	569
318. Cross-section of spinal cord showing position of main conducting tracts and line of incision for antero-lateral and for dorsal chordotomy — — — — —	574
319. X-ray appearances produced by spinal haemangioma — —	575
320. Myelograms of (a) spinal tumour ; (b) herniated nuclear mass from intervertebral disc ; (c) meningitis circumscripta serosa —	575
321. Dorsally placed spinal cord tumour exposed at operation —	576
322. Appearance of laterally placed extramedullary spinal tumour as exposed at operation — — — — —	576
323. Typical microscopical appearance of spinal meningioma containing psammoma bodies — — — — —	577
324. Typical microscopical appearance of spinal neurinoma —	577
325. Microscopical appearance of spinal haemangioma — —	578
326. Plan of operation table arranged for laminectomy — —	581
327. Position of patient for thoracic or lumbar laminectomy —	581
328–335. Stages in laminectomy — — — — —	581–584
336. Diagram to show method of closure in layers in laminectomy —	585
337. Method of exposing anterior extramedullary tumour of spinal cord	585
338. Removal of cauda equina tumour — — — —	586
339. Antero-lateral chordotomy — — — — —	588

LIST OF PLATES

PLATE	FACING PAGE
I. Concealed accidental antepartum haemorrhage (Couvelaire's uterus) — — — — —	118
II. (a) Granular colo-proctitis; (b) and (c) ulcerative colo-proctitis; (d) proctoscopy showing acute amoebic dysentery; (e) proctoscopy showing chronic amoebic dysentery — — — — —	369
III. Fig. 1. Diagrams of eye showing (a) adhesion of vitreous to retina and choroid; (b) tearing of retina at point of adhesion — — — — —	409
Fig. 2. Shallow simple detachment of retina in upper temporal quadrant — — — — —	409
IV. and V. Schistosomiasis—showing effects of eggs on tissue cells	478–479

PHARYNGEAL DIVERTICULA

BY JOHN MORLEY, CH.M., F.R.C.S.

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	PAGE
1. DEFINITION - - - - -	1
2. SURGICAL ANATOMY AND AETIOLOGY - - - - -	2
3. CLINICAL PICTURE - - - - -	3
4. COMPLICATIONS - - - - -	3
5. SPECIAL AIDS TO DIAGNOSIS - - - - -	3
6. DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS - - - - -	4
(1) Carcinoma of the oesophagus - - - - -	4
(2) Cardiospasm - - - - -	4
(3) Fibrous stricture - - - - -	4
(4) Intrathoracic goitre - - - - -	4
7. PROGNOSIS - - - - -	5
8. TREATMENT - - - - -	5
(1) Indications for operation - - - - -	5
(2) Preparation for operation - - - - -	5
(3) Operative technique - - - - -	5
(4) Post-operative management - - - - -	8
9. RESULTS - - - - -	8

1. DEFINITION

265.] The diverticula here described are pulsion diverticula formed in the posterior wall of the pharynx just above its junction with the oesophagus.

The rare traction diverticula found lower down in the oesophagus and the pulsion diverticula in the supradiaphragmatic portion of the oesophagus are not considered. The existence of an anterior diverticulum described by the late Sir Arthur Hurst (1925) as situated 2 inches higher up on the anterior wall has been disproved. The appearance he described was due to barium lodging in the vallecula between the tongue and the epiglottis (Fig. 1(a)).

The pouch we are discussing has been described, inaccurately, as oesophageal and, less

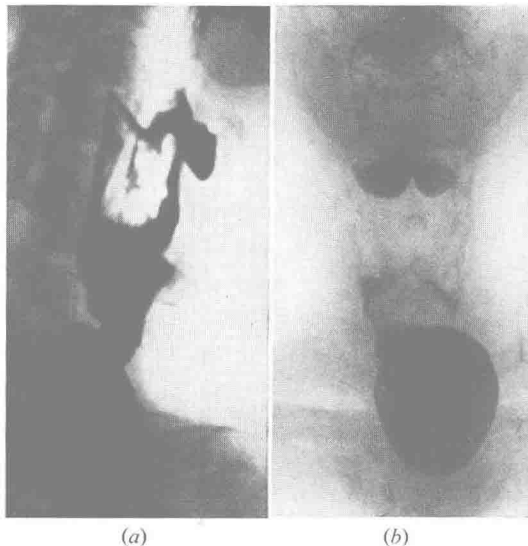


FIG. 1.—(a) Lateral view of pharyngeal pouch, also showing barium lodged in the vallecula. (b) Antero-posterior view of the same pouch with both valleculae filled with barium.

inaccurately, as pharyngo-oesophageal. Since the latter term is unduly long, and the term pharyngeal pouch is shorter and not open to misconception, it is preferred.

2. SURGICAL ANATOMY AND AETIOLOGY

On the posterior wall of the pharynx near its lower end there is a potential weak spot between the oblique fibres (thyropharyngeus) and the transverse fibres (cricopharyngeus) of the inferior constrictor muscle (Fig. 2). It is only in the event of some abnormal increase in intrapharyngeal tension that the

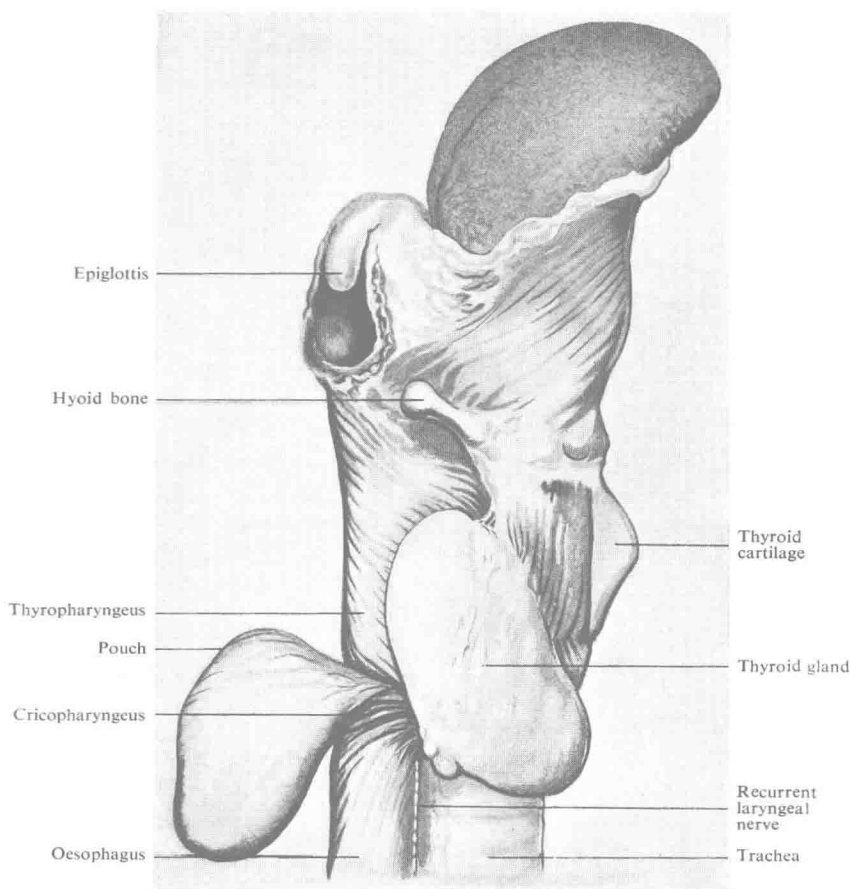


FIG. 2.—Lateral view of a dissection of a pharyngeal pouch. (After St. Clair Thomson and Negus.)

*Obstruction
of the
oesophagus*

weak spot develops into an actual herniation. The causes of this intrapharyngeal tension, however, are not easy to explain. When a gross cause of obstruction to the lower part of the oesophagus is found, such as a fibrous stricture or pressure due to an intrathoracic goitre, the explanation is obvious. In the great majority of cases, however, no such factor is present, and we are forced to assume a spasm of the cricopharyngeus muscle as the cause of the increased tension during deglutition.

Once it has started the pouch tends to increase by slow and imperceptible degrees with each act of deglutition. After the pouch has attained a certain size, it becomes, when filled with food, a source of pressure on the oesophageal lumen from behind and laterally, and gradually a vicious circle is established. The pouch, filled with food, makes deglutition more difficult, and hence food passes into the pouch more easily than into the oesophagus. At this stage serious interference with nutrition may result. *Loss of nutrition*

The pouch is a "false" one, in that its walls are not formed by all the coats of the pharynx, but only by its mucosa and submucosa herniated through the gap in the muscular coat posteriorly.

3. CLINICAL PICTURE

The condition is at least twice as common in men as in women, and occurs as a rule in middle age. Before the onset of real dysphagia there is often a sensation of something sticking in the throat which may excite an irritating cough that leads to some regurgitation of food. As the pouch enlarges slowly, the patient begins to notice both dysphagia and an obtrusive gurgling noise on swallowing. This latter is due to a mixture of fluid and air in the sac and often causes great distress to the patient and his friends, so that he dislikes to eat in public on account of the unpleasant noise. There are, at times, attacks of choking and coughing, leading to the ejection of solid particles of food that may have been taken many hours before. In some cases this is peculiarly troublesome when the patient lies down. *Early symptoms*

These symptoms may persist and cause considerable annoyance to the patient for many years without giving rise to dysphagia serious enough to interfere with nutrition. Sooner or later, however, oesophageal obstruction arises and progressive emaciation may result. In the larger pouches, and particularly in emaciated patients, there may be a visible swelling in the neck, usually on the left side, when the pouch is full of food. In such cases compression of the swelling causes immediate regurgitation of food into the mouth. *Dysphagia*

4. COMPLICATIONS

Inflammatory changes in and around the sac are rare but may occur in very large pouches. In one case the pouch had been present for over 10 years and held $1\frac{1}{2}$ pints of fluid, and the fundus was so adherent to the arch of the aorta that it tore during removal. *Adherence of fundus*

A more serious complication is the development of a squamous-cell carcinoma in the sac. I have reported two cases in which this had occurred. It is not easy to make a statistical estimate of the frequency of this complication, but enough cases have been reported to provide a strong argument against postponing surgical excision indefinitely.

5. SPECIAL AIDS TO DIAGNOSIS

Radiological examination after swallowing barium is as essential to an accurate diagnosis in this condition as it is in dysphagia from other causes. Skiagrams should be taken in the antero-posterior and in the lateral planes. The clearly defined rounded sac is quite characteristic (Fig. 1(b)). *Barium swallow*