Sect. III. ***Of Gun-shot Wounds.***

Gun-shot wounds can be conſidered in no other light than contuſed wounds. In thoſe made by a muſket or piſtol ball, the moſt immediate considerations are, to extract the ball, or any other extraneous body which may have lodged in the wounded part ; and to ſtop the hemorrhagy, if there is an effuſion of blood from the rupture of ſome conſiderable artery.

It is frequently neceſſary to enlarge the wound in order to extract the ball ; and it it has gone quite through, (pro­vided the ſituation of the part wounded will admit of its being done with ſafety), the wound is to be laid freely open through its whole length ; by which means any extraneous body will be more readily removed, and the cure facili­tated.

Tn order to get at the ball, or any other foreign matter, probing is to be uſed as ſparingly as poſſible : and this muſt evidently appear to any one who will only conſider the na­ture of the ſymptoms attendant on penetrating wounds of the breaſt or belly, either from a bullet or fharp inſtrument; the thruſting in a probe to parts under ſuch circumſtances being unavoidably a freſh ſtab on every repetition of ſuch practice. Wherever probing is neceſſary, the finger is to be preferred as the best and trueſt probe, where it can be uſed.

If a ball, or any other foreign body, happens to be lodged near the orifice, or can be perceived by the finger to lie un­der the ſkin, though at ſome diſtance from the mouth of the wound, we ſhould cut upon it and take it out : but when it is ſunk deep, and lies abſolutely beyond the reach of the finger, it muſt appear evident, upon the leaſt reflec­tion, that thruſting, firſt a long probe in queſt of the bullet, and then, as has been practiſed likewiſe, a longer pair of forceps, either with or without teeth, into a wound of that kind, though with a sort of certainty to extract it, muſt ei­ther contuſe, or irritate and inflame, the parts to a great de­gree; and conſequently do as much, or more miſchief, than the ball did at firſt by forcing its paſſage ſuch a length of way. And ſhould they at the ſame time lay hold of any conſiderable artery or nerve along with the ball (which can ſcarce ever fail of being the case), what ſhocking conſequen­ces would attend ſuch a proceeding ! Nor would attempts of this sort be leſs injurious in caſe a bullet ſhould happen to be lodged in the cavity of the belly or breaſt. Such at­tempts are the leſs necessary, becauſe a great number of in­ſtances have occurred, where balls have been quietly lodged in ſeveral parts of the body, till after many years they have worked themſelves a paſſage towards the ſurface, and were very eaſily extracted ; and many where balls have been en­tirely left behind.

In caſe the wound be occaſioned by a muſket or piſtol ſhot, and of courſe but ſmall, it will be neceſſary to dilate it without delay, provided the nature of the part will admit of this with ſafety: for in wounds near a joint, or in very membranous or tendinous parts, the knife, as well as forceps, ſhould be put under ſome reſtraint ; nor ſhould any more opening be made than what is abſolutely requiſite for the free diſcharge ot the matter lodged within.

Where the wounded perſon has not ſuffered any great loss of blood, and this is generally the caſe, it will be adviſable to open a vein immediately, and take from the arm a large quantity ; and to repeat bleeding as circumſtances may require, the second, and even the third day. Repeated bleedings in the beginning draw after them many advan­tages. They pr event a good deal of pain and inflamma­tion, lessen any feveriſh aſſaults, forward the digeſtion, and ſeldom fail to obviate impoſthumations, and a long train of complicated ſymptoms which are wont otherwise to inter­rupt the cure, miſerably haraſs the poor patient, and too often endanger his life ; and even where the feveriſh ſymp­toms run high, and there is almoſt a certainty that matter is forming, bleeding, in that ſtate, is very frequently of great advantage.

For the firſt 12 days it will be proper to obſerve a cool­ing regimen, both in reſpect of the medicines that may be preſcribed, and the diet requiſite for the ſupport of nature. It is abſolutely neceſſary likewiſe that the body be conſtantly kept open. Unleſs, therefore, nature does this office of herſelf, a ſtool ſhould be every day procured, either by emollient clyſters, or ſome gentle laxative taken at the mouth ; and whenever there is much pain in the wounded parts, immediate recourſe muſt be had to opium.

As to external applications, whatever is of a hot ſpirituous nature is remarkably injurious on theſe occaſions, and what no wounded part can in any degree bear. The wound may be dreſſed with pledgits of any emollient oint­ment ; the whole being covered with a common poultice, or, in ſome caſes, the preparations of lead may be uſed. An opiate ſhould now be adminiſtered ; and the part affected being placed in the eaſieſt and moſt convenient poſture, the patient ſhould be laid to reſt. The formation of matter, in every contuſed wound, is an object of the firſt importance ; for, till this takes place, there is often reaſon to ſuſpect that gangrene may happen. With a view to hasten ſuppuration, the warm poultices ſhould be frequently renewed, and they ſhould be continued till the tenſion and ſwelling, with which wounds of this kind are uſually attended, be removed, and till the ſore has acquired a red, healthy, granulating appear­ance, when it is to be treated like a common ulcer.

Gun ſhot wounds are commonly covered from the begin­ning with deep ſloughs, and various remedies are recommended for removing them. Every appearance, however, of this kind with which they are attended proceeds entire­ly from contuſion ; and, excepting the injury be extenſive, the ſlough is not often perceptible, or it is ſo thin as to come away along with the matter at the firſt or second dreſſing. Although emollient poultices be extremely uſeful, they ought to be no longer continued than till the effects already mentioned are produced; otherwiſe they will not only relax the parts, but alſo produce too copious a diſcharge of mat­ter, which is ſometimes attended with great danger. A too copious flow of matter may proceed from different cauſes ; but in whatever way it may have been produced, the practice to be adopted muſt be nearly the ſame. Every collec­tion which appears muſt have a free outlet, and the limb laid in that poſture which will moſt readily admit of its run­ning off. In ſuch circumſtances, nouriſhing diet and Peru­vian bark in conſiderable quantities are highly uſeful. When the diſcharge continues copious, in ſpite of every effort to check it, detached pieces of bone or ſome extraneous matter are probably the cauſe. In ſuch a ſituation nothing will lessen the quantity of matter till ſuch ſubſtances be removed. The wound ought therefore again to be examined, and looſe bodies removed. Pieces of cloth have been known to be removed by ſetons, when that method was practicable, after every other method had failed. Opium likewiſe is frequent­ly uſeful in checking an exceſſive diſcharge, when it happens to be kept up by irritation.

Although no conſiderable hemorrhagy may happen at firſt in gun-ſhot wounds; yet after the ſloughs commonly produced upon ſuch occaſions have come off, ſome conſi­derable arteries may be expoſed, and then a dangerous hemorrhagy may enſue. The hemorrhagy is often preceded by a great heat in the injured parts, and with a throbbing pulſatory pain. At this period it may frequently be pre­