PART III.

HALF-YEARLY REPORTS.

REPORT ON FORENSIC MEDICINE.

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SUICIDE BY INJURIES OF THE HEAD.

Dr. Allen Staples (Jour. Amer. Med. Assoc., Vol. VIII., No. 1) publishes an interesting study of Suicide by Injuries of the Head. He gives, among others, the following cases:

The first case is one detailed by Dr. L. Langer. A poacher, thirty-seven years old, attempted suicide by beating his head with a sharp angle of an axe. There were found on the forehead, between the frontal eminences and extending into the hair, three wounds filled with crushed and splintered bone. The middle one was about two inches long, and showed at its bottom a half-inch fissure in the bone. There was also a Y-shaped wound above and behind the right ear, extending to the bone, a similar one just above, and a large swelling just below the occipital protuberance. The man recovered in two months.

Fourmet relates a noteworthy case:—A joiner had driven an iron chisel, 3½ inches long and 3 lines broad, up to its head, by means of repeated blows from a hammer, into his cranium about the middle line. The patient became comatose, but, on the removal of the chisel in about seven hours, recovered within two weeks.

A remarkable case was published by Angenstein:—J. M., convicted of repeated arson and sentenced to imprisonment for life, was reported to have simulated epilepsy and insanity, and to have made suicidal attempts by inflicting superficial wounds on his neck and arms. In October, 1859, he drove two nails, 1½ inches long, into his frontal bone; these were with difficulty extracted by the

a Wiener med. Wochenschrift, 1878, No. 37, p. 999.
b Wiener med. Wochenschrift (R. Frank), 1885, No. 15, p. 454.
c Ibid.
forceps. In April, 1860, a similar attempt was made in the left parietal bone. He quickly recovered from the effects of each attempt. In September, 1860, he introduced under the skull a piece of wire. Signs of brain irritation followed this last wound, and a week later death ensued. The autopsy showed the dura firmly united to the skull at the place of the last injury, and the perforations through which the nails had been driven closed by membrane. There was purulent meningitis that had been caused by four needles that were found sticking into the meninges and brain. These needles had been introduced through the openings made by the nails.

A case presenting much analogy to the above is narrated by Dr. V. Biart. It was that of a convict in the Kansas State Penitentiary, who attracted much attention among his fellow-convicts by boring a hole in his skull with an awl, and introducing therein pieces of wire. The physician-in-charge removed several pieces that had pierced both cerebral hemispheres. The wound of entrance was situated in the right parietal bone, near its posterior inferior angle. The patient stated at the time that he had passed other substances into his brain. Later he committed suicide by taking morphin; and at the autopsy his brain was found congested, and a wire three inches long and three-sixteenths of an inch thick was found running from the wound of entrance to the fissure of Sylvius. A flat nail one and three-fifths inches long was also found lying near the wire.

Carpenter relates a similar case of an insane patient who sought in the following ways to take his life:—First, he bored through his skull just above the right ear, and passed a heavy wire four and three-quarters inches into the brain. Second, he thrust an awl into the vertex. Third, through the first opening he pushed another wire to the opposite side of the skull, causing a left-sided hemiplegia that lasted fourteen days. Finally, after some months, he poisoned himself with morphin. At the autopsy a piece of wire two inches long and a threaded needle were found lying near each other in the middle lobe of the right hemisphere, and in the frontal lobe were discovered a piece of wire two and one-half inches long, and a long headless nail.

Schauenstein relates the case of a labourer who gave himself

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c Ibid.