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A case of attempted division of the eighth nerve within the skull for the relief of tinnitus

CLINICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON

A meeting of this society was held on March 25, Dr Frederick Taylor, the President, being in the chair.

Mr Cuthbert S. Wallace and Mr H. J. Marriage described a case in which an attempt had been made to divide the eighth nerve within the skull for the relief of tinnitus. The patient was a female, aged 23 years, who developed left otitis media in 1898. Several operations followed and four years afterwards she began to suffer from tinnitus and vertigo, which symptoms increased in intensity to such an extent that her life was rendered thereby well-nigh intolerable. It was therefore decided to attempt to divide the eighth nerve. Numerous experiments were made on the cadaver with the result that a modification of the operation for the exploration of the posterior surface of the petrous bone was finally adopted and this was practised on September 3, 1903. The operation was made very difficult on account of the constant discharge of cerebro-spinal fluid and also by the hæmorrhage from the surface of the cerebellum. The eighth nerve was exposed and divided by traction with a blunt hook. Noises were present on the following day. there was no facial paralysis. The wound never showed any reaction and continued to discharge. The patient gradually sank and died on the twenty-first day. At the nec-

ropsy it was found that a fine strand of the auditory nerve had escaped division. There was no meningitis and the internal ear presented a normal appearance. Dr E. Farquhar Buzzard, who had made a microscopical examination of the nerve after staining by Marchi's method, said that the whole of the vestibular and two-thirds of the cochlear nerves were degenerated as a result of the section. He believed that very little was known with regard to the morbid anatomy of tinnitus, which was not a common symptom in gross organic disease of the brain except where there were lesions affecting the nerve roots at the base. The evidence that it was of central origin was not supported by pathological observation. Mr Fagge referred to two cases in which he had exposed the eighth nerve and he had not found it a matter of great difficulty. He considered that tinnitus was more frequent after mastoid operations than was generally supposed and that it was probably of peripheral origin. Dr F. Parkes Weber mentioned a case recorded by Alt of Vienna in which a leukæmic infiltration of the auditory nerve had been discovered in Ménière's disease, tinnitus being a prominent symptom in that affection. Mr Wallace replied.

Key words: Tinnitus; Neurectomy, vestibular, cochlear.