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## The Historical Approach to the Problem of Craniocerebral Injury

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## EDITORIAL

### THE HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF CRANIOCEREBRAL INJURY\*

PHILIP J. VOGEL, M.D.

Injuries to the skull and brain, with their disabling residuals, have come to occupy an important place in the practice of surgery. In peace as in war, the incidence of such injuries is large. Because of the serious nature of these injuries, the surgeon has given much attention to efforts at saving the patient from death or preserving him from crippling residuals. This effort has resulted in a considerable accumulation of knowledge, not only as to therapeutics, but also as to the mechanics of injury and of symptom production. After twenty-five hundred years of study and investigation the manifold problems of craniocerebral injury have been solved or are on the threshold of solution. And in this long drama the present actors on the stage of action have contributed much to this end.

But what of the setting, the backdrops of this scene, in the perpetual drama of surgery? What is the story which lies behind the characters now on the stage of action? By what steps have we come to our present knowledge of the mechanics, the disturbance of functions and alterations of structure, the symptomatology, the therapy, yes, even the prophylactics of trauma to the brain and its enveloping tissues?

If one takes the trouble to consult the available literature of ancient and medieval surgery, he will gain only a few fleeting

glimpses of this historical background. It is obvious that these impressions constitute only a small part of the entire picture. His search must carry him into other fields, many not closely related to the sciences and arts of medicine.

Perhaps one's first appeal should be to general history, for injuries to the skull and brain must have been common experiences in warfare in which man has engaged since earliest times. By consulting those references to personal experiences in combat which furnish color to otherwise prosaic history, we not infrequently find interesting asides as to the nature and effects of such injuries. Such references are to be sought not only on the printed page but also in ancient manuscripts and even in the inscriptions on ancient monuments. Even in the myths and legends which have come down to us since time out of mind we may detect the concepts, the impressions of many ancient peoples as to the serious effects of injuries to the head.

But we must pursue our quest beyond the written or engraved word if we are to learn the whole story. The field of ethnology must also be searched, particularly those parts which deal with warfare and weapons of the various peoples of our world. We find that scenes of combat are painted on their walls and on their pottery, molded into their clay, graven into native stone, yes, even woven into their textiles. From such pictures, additional

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information as to the mechanics, and at times effects, of cranial trauma may be obtained.

Since the purposes and intent of man are often reflected in the works of his hands, we may gain some impressions of what some of our predecessors thought about wounds of the head. Prior to the introduction of gunpowder, combat was more of a personal affair. If one eliminates those weapons which wound at a distance (arrows, darts and javelins, slingstones, and throwing clubs), we come to those

weapons which "arm the hand" to produce direct violence to the person of the enemy, many of which were designed with the major purpose of disabling one's opponent by blows to his head.

A study of these weapons, together with the means used in protecting the head against them, is a long and interesting chapter in the history of craniocerebral injury, one to which the interested student can with profit give attention.



#### NOTICE

So many requests have come in asking for number 4 of vol. 1 that we are making this announcement for all our readers. Volume 1 began with April, 1947, or the second quarter, hence there were only three numbers that year. January, 1948, begins volume 2 and is number 1. In this way each year begins a new volume.