

**IMPAIRMENT, OR LOSS OF
VISION, FROM SPINAL
CONCUSSION, OR SHOCK**

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Impairment, Or Loss of Vision, from Spinal Concussion, Or Shock by Jabez Hogg

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JABEZ HOGG

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FIG. 1.
TRANSVERSE SECTION OF HEALTHY SPINAL CORD.

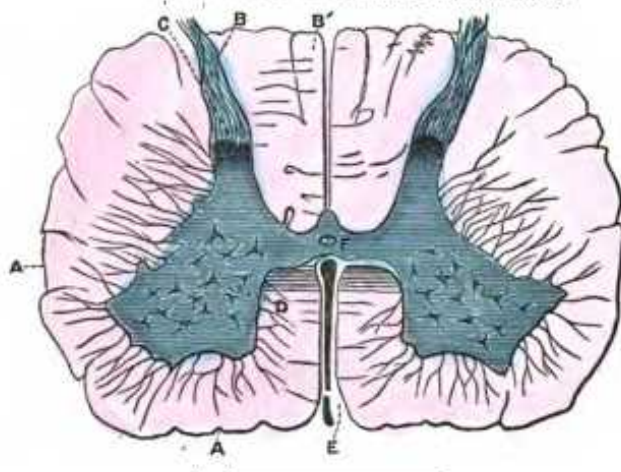
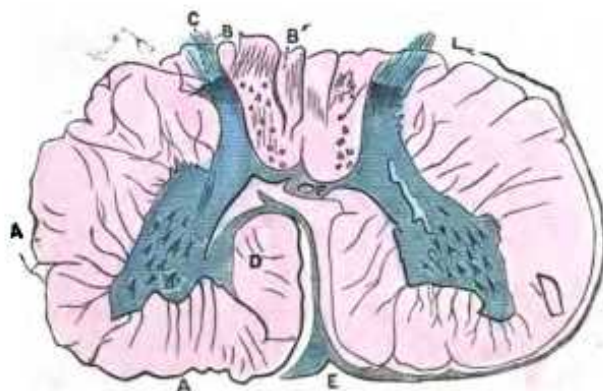


FIG. 2.
TRANSVERSE SECTION OF DISEASED SPINAL CORD.
(The Drawing is from a Preparation made by Dr. LOCKHART CLARKE.)
The letters and references same as in normal section, Fig. 1.



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OR
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BY

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[*A Paper read at the Medical Society of London, Nov. 8, 1875.*]

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IMPAIRMENT, OR LOSS
OF VISION
FROM CONCUSSION OR SHOCK.

TENDERNESS to humanity is one of the happiest characteristics of modern civilisation, and Christianity more than any other dispensation has tended to deepen the feeling in the sacredness of human life ; hence institutions have been multiplied, and means devised and adopted for the relief of every phase of suffering. At no time, however, in the history of nations, could exactitude of knowledge of disease, of diagnosis and prognosis, be more eagerly sought for or desired, than when communities are daily brought in close proximity with the severest forms of injuries arising out of our constant railway communication ; so that while our iron highways have conferred upon us considerable advantages, and have greatly facilitated intercommunication throughout the civilised world, they have likewise added to the risks and miseries of every-day life.

During a period of five years, from 1862 to 1867, and prior to Parliament making it compulsory upon railways to give a correct return of the killed and injured annually,

the average number of killed did not exceed 36 per annum. From the last-named period (1867) to the present time a progressive increase has taken place, and an average of three persons daily are now killed, and as many as eight a day are injured on the various lines of railway in this kingdom. The year 1874 will long be remembered by its disastrous casualties, the greater part of which, unhappily, arose from preventable causes. The total number of persons killed during the year on the various lines was 1,424, and of injured 5,041. Of these, 211 killed, and 1,981 injured, were passengers; of the remainder, 788 killed, and 2,815 injured, were servants of the companies or contractors; and 425 killed, and 215 injured, trespassers, or persons who met with accidents from causes over which companies have no control. The chances of being injured are, it will be seen, very great—one in every 500 are doomed to be mutilated or killed; and of the servants of the companies, one in every 350 are killed outright; while a very large number more, passengers and servants, are severely bruised, wounded, or shaken, and of whose injuries no record is kept.

The typical form of railway accident more frequently ending in spinal injury, and, *pari passu*, most destructive to human beings, is that caused by collision. It is impossible to ignore the fact that the greater number of collisions are due to causes quite within the control of railway companies. No better evidence of this can be adduced than that given at an inquest on one of the killed in the collision which occurred in September last to an excursion train on the London, Tilbury, and Southend line, when upwards of sixty persons were either injured or killed. The cruel neglect displayed was graphically described by a competent witness, who stated that no block system is

adopted, *although a part of the line is single.* The working of signals is left to chance, as no instructions whatever are issued to drivers and signalmen. Working time-tables are unknown, and therefore trains are allowed to follow each other haphazard. The line, it was stated, had been opened for twenty-one years, and no rule-books or instructions whatever were issued for the guidance of the servants until about a week ago, and therefore a signalman who ought to have been at his post to give the signal of danger at the time of the collision was engaged in the landing of cattle. Interlocking gear for points and signals are nowhere employed, and trains consisting of eighteen carriages are despatched with only one guard, the staff being too short-handed to admit of a second.

It rarely happens, on taking up a morning paper, that we do not read of a laxity of management little short of criminal neglect of the public safety. This morning (Nov. 8th, 1875) an account of a lamentable collision is reported. A passenger train dashed into a goods train near Chippenham, and scarcely a passenger escaped without cuts, bruises, or broken limbs. One gentleman is unfortunately seriously injured for the second time.

"Each new morn
New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
Strike heaven on the face."

A succession of "so-called" accidents means, in plain language, a general incapacity to meet emergencies, and we are led to believe that railway directors think and care less of the lives of passengers than of the cost of adopting scientific appliances and means by which collisions can be prevented. In other words, managers and directors prefer taking the chance of being mulcted in

damages to putting into force good rules and taking proper precautions for the safety of their customers. Notwithstanding so palpable and trite a truism, it is usual to hear complaints of exorbitant demands for mutilated limbs and lost sight, as if mental suffering, bodily pain, broken legs, and the loss of a valuable life, frequently the bread-winner of the family, could be compensated for by any amount of railway gold. But have directors of English railways any just cause of complaint of the excessive damages awarded by juries in railway injuries? Certainly not. This has been conclusively demonstrated by M. de Franquville, who lately compared what he not inaptly calls "the butcher's bill" of France with that of England. He says: "In France in 1873, 62 persons were killed outright, and 1,191 more injured; while in England 271 were killed and 9,221 injured. In respect of damages awarded for injuries there cannot be the least ground for complaint against English juries, as the average amount awarded was 5,868 francs in England, and 20,852 francs in France." So much, then, for the reiterated statement that juries sympathize with the injured and award excessive damages.

It is quite possible to believe, however, that juries will sympathize with mutilated passengers rather than with managing directors who lack sympathy for widows and orphans of servants killed in the faithful discharge of duty. It is quite possible, also, that among the large number of persons annually maimed and lamed a few will make the most of their injuries; but it is surely not to be expected that medical men will in all cases detect impostors, for have they not to take patients' statements of subjective symptoms, of deteriorated health and strength, and inability to attend to business, and so forth? In some instances

even experts will be deceived, and then comes a conflict of opinion as to cause and effect. It is not quite so easy to simulate objective symptoms, of lost vision, of diminished muscular power, of shrunken, paralysed limbs,—any and all of which are known to be due to organic change in nerve tissue. I regard it nevertheless as a reproach to a learned profession that there should be that divergence of opinion so frequently displayed in courts of justice, particularly in inquiries on the nature and extent of railway injuries. It is positively lamentable when a member of the profession appears in the character of an advocate, volunteers statements and unasked for explanations, and in a manner acts as a partisan rather than as a scientific expert, anxious to assist in arriving at the truth and balancing the scales of justice between contending parties.

A remarkable instance of inconsistency of opinion—one constituting just grounds of animadversion on the part of jurists—occurred very recently in the case of *Wood v. The Manchester and Sheffield Railway Company*. The wretched man *Wood* was in the collision near the *Conisburgh* station only two months before he died from his injuries. His medical advisers properly treated him for traumatic meningitis, and ultimately certified that this was the cause of death. On the part of the railway company it was contended by certain witnesses that he died from typhoid fever, and not from meningitis. The grounds for this supposition were that typhoid fever had prevailed to some extent near *Wood's* farm: no one in his house was in any way affected, but this gave the cue. The medical witnesses examined at the trial differed, it will be seen, as to cause and effect, and oddly enough as to the post-mortem appearances of the