

Obituary Notice.

EDOARDO PORRO.

THE name of Porro has passed permanently into the nomenclature of obstetrics, just as the names of so many anatomists, physiologists, and surgeons are associated with structures, processes, and operations in the whole of medical science and practice. Yet, as in the case of so many others, the medical profession in Europe, and even the specialists in obstetrics and gynaecology, have known comparatively little of the per-



sonality of the remarkable man who has recently passed away at the age of sixty years. His active professional career was comparatively short, and for the last ten years or so of his life, active participation in work other than that of the obstetrician, and to some extent, impaired health and energy, have dissociated him from professional functions and those ephemeral professional publications which confer eminence upon, or at least give prominence to, many, in the eyes of the contemporary world of medicine.

Porro was born at Padua in 1842, and he died at Milan on July 18, 1902. He received his early education in Padua, and, in spite of considerable embarrassment owing to want of pecuniary means, he obtained

his medical diploma at the University of Pavia at the age of twenty-three. Instead of devoting himself at once to the pursuit of his profession, he volunteered as a soldier under Garibaldi, and followed the revolutionary leader in the cause of Italian unity in the campaign of 1866 in the Tyrol, and he was present the following year at the surrender of Mentana. This event closed his soldier-career.

Next year he was appointed to the position of assistant in the department of obstetrics in one of the hospitals in Milan. For over seven years he devoted himself to the study and practice of obstetrics and gynæcology, and the testimony of all his biographers goes to show that as instructor and clinician he was industrious, exact, energetic, and original, yet conservative and honest.

In 1875 he obtained the appointment of Professor of Obstetrics in the University of Pavia, 'not by the protection of the great or by caprice of fortune, but by the force of true and real merit.'

The epoch-making operation, with which we associate the name of Porro, was first performed on May 21, 1876. The operation was far removed from being a mere stroke of happy chance, or the fortuitous result of operative proceedings commenced under a misapprehension or mistaken diagnosis, as has been so often the case in the initial stages of advances in gynæcology. It was led up to by years of reflection and experiment. Among the most powerful influences on his mind in favour of Cæsarean section, was his systematic investigation into the results of induction of premature labour during his residence in Milan. In 1871 he published '*Risultati apparenti e risultati veri del parto prematuro artificiale.*' The indications for induction arose chiefly from contraction of the pelvis produced by rachitis or osteomalacia. In 148 cases, 102 of the children were born alive, but only 22 survived at the end of a year. The maternal mortality amounted to 5 per cent. It is easy to surmise the impression that such results would have on the mind of the obstetrician. He was, no doubt, also strongly influenced by his experience of cephalotripsy, and his unfortunate record with the remarkable forceps of Lovati, his predecessor in Pavia. In any case, there can be no question that, during the years 1874-75, Porro made many experiments in the removal of the uterus in pregnant rabbits, and took such opportunities as came in his way of operating on the cadaver, with the object of preparing himself for the operation which he ultimately performed on the living patient. His operation was entirely successful with regard to both mother and child. He published the case to the world a few months later—'*Della amputazione utero-ovarico come complemento di taglio cesareo*' (Milan, 1876). This is not the place to discuss the influence of Porro's operation upon the history of obstetrics during the last quarter of a century. But it may be remarked without irrelevancy that the interest aroused by the operation and the admiration excited by its conception and execution did a great deal for Italian obstetrics and gynæcology. Just as the participation by Sardinia with England and France in the Crimean War, attracted the attention of the world to a new factor in European politics and prepared and partly disciplined the Italian people for the events which ultimately culminated in Italian political unity, so the work of Porro attracted the attention of the medical profession in Europe to the achievements of Italian physicians and surgeons to an extent unknown since the schools of Padua and Bologna began to decline. *Propter hoc* or *post hoc*, the fact remains that it is only during the last quarter of a century that European Medicine has looked to Italy for scientific work worthy of its reputation in mediæval times; and perhaps it is not too much to allege that the stimulus thus produced led up to those recent Italian achievements in scientific medicine which the world recognises and appreciates.

In 1882, after seven years' incumbency, Porro resigned his chair in

Pavia and returned to Milan as Director of the Maternity Hospital. Formerly at Milan, during his period of office at Pavia, and again at Milan, Porro published a large number of contributions, on various subjects, to the progress of obstetrics and gynaecology. Latterly, in Milan, he devoted a considerable share of his energies to administrative, sanitary, and medico-legal work. Most noteworthy were the much-needed improvements in the sanitary condition of the hospitals, especially of the Ospedale Maggiore, brought about by his enlightened energy and influence. His last contribution to gynaecology, that on *Ovarioclasia*, was published in 1888. Among the medico-social improvements which he had the courage and the influence to effect was the introduction of a certain amount of control over some reckless practices of Italian midwives.

Among many indications of the public appreciation of Porro's disinterested and public-spirited efforts at social amelioration was his elevation to the dignity of Senator in November, 1891.

Last year the obstetricians of Italy determined, as well they might, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Porro's operation, and they successfully appealed to the co-operation and sympathy of Europe and America. A medal was struck in commemoration of the event, and the task of compiling a record of all the Porro operations performed throughout the world until May 21, 1901, was entrusted to Professor Truzzi, of Padua. The result of that inquiry we have never been able to ascertain, but whatever the mere figures may show, the world will be none the less under eternal obligation to the man who had the genius to conceive, and the courage to execute, an operation so far-reaching in its beneficent influence upon the practice of obstetrics.

That Porro's unselfishness, and broad-minded and public-spirited philanthropy were appreciated by his fellow-citizens of Milan was clearly proved by the scene in that city on the day of his funeral. The people probably only vaguely apprehended the cause and import of his professional fame at home and abroad, but they understood and appreciated his work as reformer, sanitarian, and philanthropist, and they gave striking expression to their love and esteem for the living man by the way in which they deplored his death.

Porro's professional eulogists represent him as a man of lofty ideals, and full of physical, mental, and moral energy, which he expended in seeking to realize them. He was an honest gynaecologist, devoted to exact clinical observation. The strict integrity of his character prevented him from dealing otherwise than truthfully and conscientiously with the statistics of his work. Though all testimony represents him as an able and successful operator, he never succumbed to the operation mania. He looked to the remote as well as to the immediate results of his operations, and hence it was that, with an enormous *clientèle*, he distinguished himself by the comparatively small number of his operations. He was, therefore, little heard of at congresses and reunions of famous operating gynaecologists. Still, in the course of a comparatively short professional career it was a great thing to achieve such a reputation by strictly professional work and devotion to the cause of social amelioration, moral and physical, among his own people, that it could be said of him after his death, in the unmistakably earnest tones of conviction, that he was *vero cavaliere dell'umanità sofferente*.