

SURGERY

# Surgery Saves Patients From Heart Constriction

## Removal of Part of Pericardium Saves Patients From Death or Life of Hopeless Invalidism From Pick's Disease

**H**ITHERTO hopeless Pick's disease has yielded to the surgeon's knife, which frees the heart from the abnormal tightening grip of the surrounding fibers.

"Cure is now possible by surgery and an imposing number of successful cases of pericardial resections is being accumulated," states Dr. Paul D. White of the Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, (*Lancet*, Sept. 14).

Patients doomed by this disease to an untimely death or at best to a life of invalidism have been saved by surgical removal of part of the fibrous bag which surrounds the heart, called the pericardium. In Pick's disease the wall of this bag thickens and becomes so contracted that it constricts the heart, preventing its normal filling in dilatation. Patients having this condition suffer from dropsy of the abdomen, legs, and face. They may be short of breath. The liver is enlarged and the jugular veins are unduly prominent.

### Six Patients Cured

Dr. White reports six patients cured and one 75 per cent. relieved by surgery.

The first successful operation for the condition in America was performed by Dr. White's surgical colleague, Dr. E. D. Churchill. Dr. White has been interested in the diagnosis of the disease and in the present report points out how this condition may be distinguished from other diseases with which it is often confused, among them cirrhosis of the liver.

Dr. Churchill has been responsible for the operative treatment with the impressive cures of patients who formerly would have remained invalids for the remaining years of their lives.

Besides the record of six patients cured at his own institution, Dr. White calls attention to the fact that Dr. Claude Beck and associates of Cleveland have reported five patients cured and one improved, and Dr. Charles S. Burwell and associates of Nashville have reported three patients greatly relieved and two partially relieved by operation.

The first patient successfully treated by surgery was an eighteen-year-old girl who had suffered from Pick's disease for

years. She was unable to attend school and led the life of an invalid, with frequent visits to clinic and hospital for medical treatments that gave little or no relief.

"She certainly has had a very miserable time and I am afraid there is not much that can be done to help her," Dr. White said in reporting her condition shortly before the operation.

At operation, Dr. Churchill removed an area of constricting pericardium about the size of the palm of the hand. Within a few weeks the patient had lost all her dropsy, her liver had decreased considerably in size and her weight dropped thirty pounds. She has continued in excellent health and full activity ever since, a period of nearly seven years.

"There are three essentials for a successful operation," Dr. White states in discussing the surgical cures of Pick's disease.

These are: (1) accurate diagnosis; (2) selection of a case that is more or less crippled and yet not too sick to stand the extensive operation that is necessary—what surgeons call a "reasonable risk;" and (3) an experienced chest surgeon who is "bold and yet cautious, who will do enough to free the heart and yet not too much to endanger the patient's life."

Treatment of the disease by digitalis or by another surgical operation called omentopexy should be discarded, Dr. White declared, because they are ineffective, both in theory and in practice.

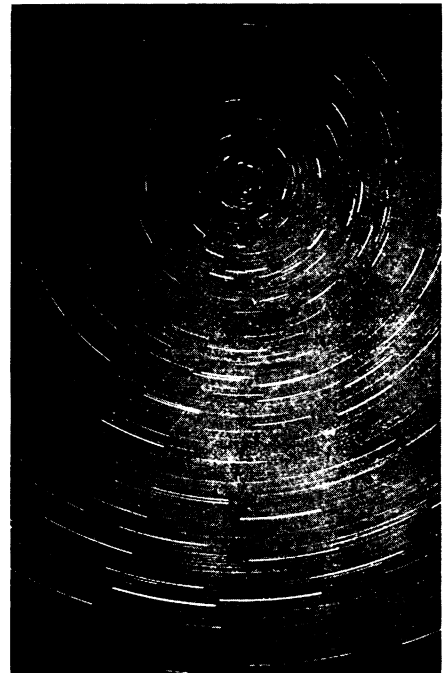
*Science News Letter, October 5, 1935*

ASTRONOMY

## No South Polar Star in Cold Antarctic Heavens

**S**TARS that circle endlessly through the Antarctic night, when the midnight sun is shining on the earth's opposite pole, have no master-star to stand at the center of their dance.

This is shown strikingly in a photograph taken during the stay of the second Byrd Antarctic Expedition at Little America, by Prof. Thomas C. Poulter, Physicist at Iowa Wesleyan College, who was second-in-command of the expedi-



NO SOUTH POLE STAR

tion. The photograph in this case was made by pointing a camera at the zenith and leaving the shutter open for an hour.

Note that at Little America the "Pole" of the sky is not far from the zenith or center of the picture. Stars register their circling courses around the pole as concentric arcs of light.

Such a picture of the northern sky always shows the Pole Star at the center, a steady point of light, but the center of the Antarctic sky is blank—a target without a bullseye.

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ARCHAEOLOGY

## Grave of Rich Viking Has Been Found in Sweden

**T**HE GRAVE of a fifth century Viking chief, buried with his horse, armor, and more gold ornaments than any burial mound in Sweden has ever revealed, has been unearthed at Fullero, in Upland province.

The Viking was buried in full panoply, is the verdict of archaeologists who have examined the remnants of cloth, shield buckle, silver spur, and gold rings, from the grave. Parts of the horse's skeleton were also found. Above the grave was a fire pit of hard clay lumps for the funeral pyre.

The antiquities go, by law, to the Historical Museum at Stockholm.

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