HISTORY
OF
A VERY FATAL AFFECTION
OF THE
PUDENDUM
OF
FEMALE CHILDREN.

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THE disease to which I wish to call the attention of the Society, has attracted so little the notice of medical authors, and is so extremely fatal, that I trust no apology is necessary for throwing together such remarks upon it, as have occurred from time to time in the course of my practice.

Of this affection I have seen twelve cases, all occurring in patients between one and six years of age: of these only two recovered, and they were the only cases in which my attendance was required early in the disease. My notes of these two

cases have enabled me to describe the earlier appearances of the disease. The great rapidity with which it proceeds to an extent, which the tender constitutions of infants and children are unable to support ; the insidious manner of its first appearance ; the similarity in its commencement to some ordinary affections of the parts ; its novelty, for I have always seen parents more surprised than alarmed ; all these circumstances contribute to that period being passed over, when alone medical means can be serviceable.

The commencement of this affection is attended with chilliness succeeded by heat ; slight pain in the head, dulness, nausea, loss of appetite and thirst ; the tongue has a clay-coloured deposit ; the bowels are torpid, and the patient is languid, inert, and listless. These symptoms precede the affection of the pudendum about three days. The patients first call the attention of parents more particularly to the seat of the disease by complaints of pain in voiding urine, or when too young this is observed by the cries and struggles of the child during the act of emptying the bladder. When the genital organs are examined, one or both labia are found inflamed and enlarged, the inflammation is of a dark tint, and soon extends internally over the clitoris, nymphæ, and hymen ; the pain in voiding the urine may induce a supposition that the inflammation extends into the urethra, and a thin secretion, which at this period may be observed coming from

these parts, renders it not improbable that the lower part of the vagina may be affected.

From this period of the formation of the inflammation so rapid is the progress to ulceration, that scarcely twenty-four hours elapse before a number of small vesications forming within the labia, as well as externally, burst and form so many open surfaces which, quickly spreading into each other, form larger ulcers; this was the progress in one case, in the other the skin opened without any previous vesication. The thin discharge which the inner membrane secretes, is now mixed with the secretions from the ulcerations, and is dark coloured, peculiarly offensive, and copious, irritating the adjacent parts, and contributing to extend the disease along the perineum to the anus, and to the inner part of the top of the thigh, contiguous to the labia. I have also seen the inflammation spread over the mons Veneris, and be succeeded by deep ulcerations progressively extending as long as life continued.

The pulse is quick and irritable after the inflammation commences, and as the ulceration extends, the face becomes of a peculiar pallid hue, the skin having a very singular whiteness, which I have never seen absent after the ulcerations had formed. As the bowels are slow at this period, the opening remedies uniformly bring away dark, slimy and offensive stools; and in two or three cases I have

seen aphthæ spread extensively around the anus, and over the perineum, and most extensively in a case which I shall have occasion to detail.

The ulcerations in this affection are not of an equal depth, or appearance, but various in this respect, as well as in the state of the bottom, which in some places is foul as well as deep, in others superficial and sprinkled with small red granulations.

It may be easily conceived that in such a state of the organs of generation, the pain upon moving the pelvis is excruciating, and hence the patients, when sufficiently old to consult their own ease, constantly lie upon the back with the knees bent and thrown open; this circumstance of pain being produced upon the least motion greatly aids the tendency to inaction in the bowels. There is a most important symptom arising from the extreme pain and tenderness of these organs, viz. a retention of urine, attended with its usual concomitants, tenderness and swelling of the abdomen, and this is so common as to require a vigilant attention, and a vigorous exertion of parental authority, to induce the patient to resort to a voluntary effort.

It has not appeared to me that this disease required any particular time to finish its course, this depending upon the vigour of the patient's constitution, and the original violence of the attack.

From the time that the ulcerative action is completely established, the enlarged labia diminish, and the redness disappears, the ulcer successively extending over parts which had been inflamed. The character of the disease at this time is that of a deep, foul, and spreading ulcer, upon parts weakened by a peculiar inflammation, and a constitution injured and weakened by previous febrile symptoms. The external organs of generation are now progressively destroyed; the peculiar pallor of the countenance increases; the pulse becomes quick and weak; the appetite fails; the bowels become loose; the skin of the thighs hangs loose and flabby as in marasmus; the discharge from the parts increases and becomes more and more offensive, till the patient is worn out and expires:

But if this disease is early seen, and checked by the proper use of applications and remedies, the ulcerations clean and heal, but never without leaving the constitution debilitated and injured. After the sores are healed, there continues a copious yellow mucous discharge from the vagina and external organs, which hinders the patient from recovering strength, and keeps up a tendency to the recurrence of the disease, which I have twice seen, and which in one case proved fatal.

The duration of this affection is various: in one case the patient got better in 23 days, in a second she recovered in 17 days; it is to be understood

that we speak here of the original disease ; the mucous discharge, unusual paleness, and general debility, continuing six or eight weeks, but these are only to be looked upon as the consequences of the original affection. It is not possible to say what may be the duration of a fatal disease, this depending on so many circumstances of violence, constitution, &c. which must necessarily influence the rapidity of the termination. Where the ulceration is deep and extensive I have never seen the patient recover. I have never seen the affection terminate in mortification but once, and in this case, which proved fatal, I was a spectator of the treatment, which consisted in the application of powerful stimulants to the parts affected. This treatment undoubtedly originated in an incorrect view of the disease, and under this plan the external organs tumefied largely, and the supervention of mortification soon completed its course.

The similarity of this affection to some of the more violent cases of intertrigo, or galling, is very evident in its commencement, but the intertrigo, when found near the organs of generation, commences in the deep space betwixt the labia and thigh : whereas the affection here spoken of, uniformly commences on the anterior part of the labia, and extends internally over the parts contained within the fissura magna ; after the secretion begins to be copious, the adjacent parts to which the matter is applied, assume the same actions, as the

perineum, anus, top of the thigh. It is probable that Armstrong had seen some cases similar to the subjects of this paper, as may be gathered from his Essay on the Diseases of Children.

If any similarity can be traced betwixt the subject of this paper and any other described disease, I presume it is the erysipelas infantilis, but even here there are so many points of difference, that the identity of the two diseases can by no means be allowed. Dr. Underwood, whom I shall here quote, states that the erysipelas infantilis ordinarily attacks within "a few days after birth: it was remarked (says he) in the former edition, that it was thought never to appear later than the month; but I have since seen it in a child of two months old." The affection which is my present subject, I have never seen under one year old, but frequently from one year up to six years of age; the patients who recovered were five years and a half, and six years of age, and I shall presently quote another four years old. Dr. Underwood states that the milder species forms matter in a very short time. The formation of matter never takes place in the disease I describe, the inflammation runs early into ulceration, but never suppurates, matter only appears as the secretion from the ulcerated surface. Again Dr. Underwood states that the more violent kind very often mortifies, whereas the disease I speak of rarely runs into mortification unless improperly treated, as in the case before attended to; and it may be

well here to observe, that the chief stimulant used in the case as an application, was the ol. camphoræ, which increased all the symptoms, whereas Dr. Garthshore found "linen compresses wrung out of camphorated spirit, successful in checking the inflammation" in the *erysipelas infantilis*.

These may be thought sufficient points of distinction, but more will be found if we refer to the dissections of the two diseases. In the *erysipelas infantilis* "upon examining several bodies, after death, the contents of the belly have been frequently found glued together, and their surfaces covered with inflammatory exudation;" "in males the tunicæ vaginales have been sometimes found filled with matter, which has evidently made its way from the cavity of the abdomen;" "in females the labia pudendi are affected in like manner, the pus having forced a passage through the abdominal rings." Now in a case which I shall hereafter quote, the body having been inspected, "the abdominal and thoracic viscera were found to have been free from disease." The *erysipelas infantilis* attacks equally male and female infants, whereas the disease here spoken of attacks female children alone. I presume that the circumstances above stated will be sufficient to shew that these diseases are distinct from each other; indeed, so far is any inflammatory affection of the contents of the abdomen from accompanying this disease, that the patient evidently sinks under the debilitating influence of a deep

and spreading ulceration; and the organs of generation never exhibit any collection of matter, either as originally formed in their substance, or as the consequence of suppuration in the cavity of the belly. From all these considerations, it is not unreasonable to conclude the disease to be of a distinct and specific nature; its progress, its early termination in such deep and extensive ulcerations, the peculiar whiteness of the face which I have never seen absent, its being confined in its commencement to the organs of generation, and being preceded by its specific fever, all tend to confirm the opinion. Like to all other inflammations, which end in the early destruction of parts, this is attended with fever of a low kind; the pulse which early in the disease is frequent and weak; the clay-coloured tongue, torpid bowel, and vitiated biliary secretions; the dull headache, languor and lassitude shew this; the purple hue of the inflamed parts, and their early ulceration, with an aggravation of the symptoms, compel us to consider it as a disease of debility, and necessarily lead to the plan of cure.

In this disease, the first part of the treatment is to move the sluggish bowels, for which purpose a sufficient dose of the submurias hydrarg. with pulv. rhei, will answer best, and uniformly bring away dark-coloured and offensive stools. The affected parts should be frequently washed with the liquor plumbi acetatis dilutus, slightly aired, and poultices

made with the same liquor, and soft bread, applied warm immediately after the parts have been washed. The intention of these means is to sooth and diminish the inflammation, and they should be persisted in during the inflammatory action, and till the progress of the ulceration is checked, and even longer if tenderness, excoriations, or aphthæ, should affect the perineum, or anus.

It will be necessary to commence the use of bark in decoction, as soon as the ulcerative action is commenced; I have commonly added the *confectio aromatica* with *tinct. calumbæ*, and small doses of *tinct. opii*: during the use of these means, the bowels should be opened every second or third day; and a moderate use of red wine may be allowed.

In the latter part of the disease, when the tumefaction and redness are diminished, and the ulcerations stationary, I have found the *ung. oxidi plumbi albi* very useful.

When the bowels become loose, which they do in the latter stages, the *elect. mimosæ catechu* is of excellent service, as a warm and powerful astringent, increasing at the same time the dose of *tinct. opii*. When the bowels would bear the use of the bark in substance, I have often given it, and have often seen the plan render a spreading ulcer stationary, and protract the fatal termination, where

the constitution had received an injury it was unable to repair.

There is one point of view in which a consideration of this disease is highly important. The instances in which parents, on behalf of children, bring forward individuals upon the charge of rape, are disgustingly frequent; and it can scarcely be doubted, that this disease has been frequently considered in court as evidence of violence and venereal infection; inflammation, ulceration and discharge having always had particular attention in a consideration of the evidence. That very erroneous conclusions may be drawn from a superficial inquiry into these symptoms, will be evident from the preceding observations. I subjoin the following case, which has not hitherto attracted sufficient attention, both as an illustration of this point, and an additional evidence of the existence of this singular affection.

“ Jane Hampson *, aged four, was admitted an out-patient of the (Manchester) Infirmary, Feb. 11, 1791. The female organs were highly inflamed, sore and painful; and it was stated by the mother, that the child was as well as usual till the preceding day, when she complained of pain in making water. This induced the mother to examine the

* See Medical Ethics, by Dr. Percival. Note by Mr. Ward, of Manchester, page 231.

parts affected, when she was surprised to find the appearances above described. The child had slept two or three nights in the same bed with a boy fourteen years old ; and had complained that morning of having been hurt by him in the night.

“ Leeches, and other external applications, together with appropriate internal remedies, were prescribed ; but the debility increased, and on the 20th of February the child died. The coroner’s inquest was taken, previously to which the body was inspected, and the abdominal and thoracic viscera were found to have been free from disease. The circumstances above related having been proved to the satisfaction of the jury, and being corroborated by the opinion I gave, that the child’s death was occasioned by external violence, a verdict of murder was returned against the boy with whom she had slept. A warrant was therefore issued against the boy, but he had absconded, a circumstance which was considered as a confirmation of his guilt, when added to the circumstantial evidence alleged against him.

“ Not many weeks however had elapsed, before similar cases occurred, in which there was no reason to suspect that external violence had been offered ; and some in which it was absolutely certain, that no such injury could have taken place. A few of the patients died, though from the novelty and fatal tendency of the disease, more than

common attention was paid to them. I was then convinced I had been mistaken in attributing Jane Hampson's death to external violence; and I informed the coroner of the reasons which produced this change of opinion. The testimony I gave was designedly made public, and the friends of the boy hearing of it, prevailed upon him to surrender himself.

“ When he was called to the bar at Lancaster, the judge informed the jury that the evidence adduced was not sufficient to convict him; that it would give rise to much indelicate discussion, if they proceeded on the trial; and that he hoped, therefore, they would acquit him without calling any witnesses. With this request the jury immediately complied.”

CASE I.

On Jan. 22, 1815, I was desired to see Miss R. aged six years: she had complained three or four days of headache; had been chilly, and occasionally hot; she had been sickly, and taken little food; was dull, heavy, and languid. This morning she had complained of pain in making water: upon examination the pudendum was found inflamed; upon which I was called in.

The inner surface of the left labium was ulcer-

ated, as well as the clitoris; the right labium was inflamed, and the whole parts tumefied, of a dark purple hue, not unlike some kinds of erysipelas; the mons Veneris was enlarged and inflamed; the perineum was inflamed and covered with aphthæ, which also encircled the anus, the discharge was thin, copious, and offensive, and had inflamed the top of the thigh, where it had been suffered to remain. The face had a peculiar paleness; the bowels were slow; the pulse quick and weak; the appetite diminished; the tongue of a dull clay colour. She was thirsty, complained of chilliness, and was indisposed for motion. The liquor plumbi acetatis dilutus was ordered as a lotion, to be applied lukewarm; and poultices made up with the same fluid were directed. A decoction of bark was also given with confectio cardiaca.

By the use of these means, the enlargement of the parts gradually subsided, the foul bottom of the sores became red, after which the ointment of white lead was used, and the parts healed by the 14th of February, a space of seventeen days from the first attendance.

In this case the affection again returned, but was early cured by resorting to the same remedies. The patient frequently retained the urine twenty-four hours, the pain was so violent, and obstinately resisted every inclination to empty the bowels, so

that the opening remedies were obliged to be exhibited with a regular attention.

CASE II.

On the 25th of April, 1815, I saw Miss S. aged five years and a half. She had been unwell a few days previous to the 21st, when complaining of pain in voiding the urine, the parts were examined and found slightly red; they were washed with milk and water, and dusted with the lapis calaminaris. On the 22nd the inflammation had increased, and the parts were slightly excoriated. On the 23rd a thick yellow discharge was observed, the patient was getting more unwell, the bowels were slow. On the 24th the open surfaces were enlarging, and small watery vesicles appeared upon the labia and perineum; upon the left thigh also was a large cluster; the bowels were twice opened this day by some family purgative.

On the 25th I saw the patient, and found both labia enlarged, and of a purple redness, with numerous small watery vesicles, upon the external surface, and also within the fissura magna. They were similar to cowpock vesicles of the third and fourth day; were found also upon the perineum, and the top of the left thigh. In some places the tops of the vesi-

cations were loosened, and shewed beneath a deep foul ulcer, particularly in the cluster upon the thigh, and on the anterior part of the labia. The parts within the fissura magna were every where red and inflamed, and several small ulcers were found. The skin around the anus was painful and red; and the secretion was then copious and offensive. There was a dull headache, a quick and irritable pulse, a moist tongue, but bearing a clay-coloured deposit; the motions on the 24th were dark-coloured and offensive; the patient was considerably weakened, and the face of a peculiar paleness. I advised saturnine lotions slightly warmed, and saturnine poultices without oil, to the parts, and gave small doses of pulv. rhei in a saline mixture every three hours.

April 26. Fresh vesications still appearing; and when the tops of the earlier vesicles had come away, the parts beneath were deeply ulcerated. Several aphthæ were observed within the labia, upon the perineum, and around the anus. The skin was hot and dry; the bowels open, and motions dark and offensive; with excessive pain upon voiding the urine.

27. The top is thrown off from the cluster of vesicles upon the thigh, as well as from the vesications upon the pudendum and perineum; the open surfaces are deep and foul, secreting largely a thin

and offensive matter; the anus surrounded with aphthæ; the pulse 120; skin hot and dry; bowels open, and urine excessively hot and painful. Ordered a decoction of bark, with the conf. cardiaca; recommended a little red wine to the patient, and to continue the applications to the parts.

28. The bowels slow; the urine has been retained thirty hours; the abdomen tender and hard; with much difficulty she was prevailed upon to void the urine, which was copious, high-coloured, and of a strong smell: the aphthæ had almost disappeared, and the diseased parts shewed a large ulcer of various depths, extending over the pudendum and perineum, down to the anus; the parts within the labia were in the same state, and a deep ulcer, but not extensive, lay upon the left thigh, on its upper and inner part; the secretion is thin, copious, and offensive. The sores were ordered to be washed with the lotion as usual, and dressed with the white lead ointment. Continue the bark mixture, and increase the wine.

29th and 30th. The ulcerations were stationary; the same means were continued; but as the bowels were slow, they were moved with an infusion of senna.

May 1. Sores improving; the bottom becoming

less foul, and discharge less offensive ; pulse 90 and weak ; appetite poor ; sits up a little ; great inclination to retain the urine ; bowels open. Continue the applications and remedies.

2nd. The sores improving, as well as the strength. This state of improvement continued regularly, till the sores were healed on the 14th. After the healing, the pudendum continued discoloured and tender, and a considerable yellow mucous discharge continued with varying quantity for the space of six or eight weeks ; this was relieved by a continued use of the tinct. lyttæ, bathing the parts frequently in the day with a solution of the sulphas zinci ; the shower-bath was also used with the intention of checking the secretion, as well as getting up the strength. I saw this patient on the 27th of June, when the discharge had ceased.

Upon looking over my notes, I find that, in nine years, I have seen twelve cases ; of these, I have only seen the two above related so early as to be materially serviceable ; the others being among the children of labourers, had little chance, either from the attention or punctuality of the parents, of getting over so very formidable a disease. One, a little girl of two years old, recovered, and was attacked again in the course of a fortnight, which second attack proved fatal. In a

girl, five years of age, where the earlier appearances of the disease had been entirely overlooked, the mother, upon finding an extensive ulcer, brought the child to me, under the idea of its having received injury from fire, which had escaped attention. The case proved fatal.