FACTS
ILLUSTRATING THE
EFFECTS OF THE VENEREAL DISEASE
ON THE
FŒTUS IN UTERO,
AND THE
MODES OF ITS COMMUNICATION.

BY WILLIAM HEY, Esq. F.R.S. &c. &c.
OF LEEDS.

COMMUNICATED IN A LETTER TO
JOHN PEARSON, Esq. F.R.S. &c. &c.

Read June 25, 1816.

Leeds, April 8, 1816.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING been engaged in the practice of midwifery during fifty-seven years, many opportunities have been afforded me of seeing the effects of the venereal disease upon the fœtus in utero, as manifested in the earliest infancy of children ; and, at your request, I sit down to communicate some observations which I have made upon this subject.

I shall first describe that disease in the infantile state which I consider to be the lues venerea, or syphilis; and then take notice of the different modes by which it may be communicated to the foetus in utero.

I cannot better describe the disease in question, than by relating to you the last case which has occurred in my practice. A poor woman, the wife of a soldier, brought to my surgery, a few weeks ago, her child, an infant betwixt two and three months of age. This child, without any disorder in its bowels, had become extremely fretful; its voice was grown stridulous. It had upon its chin a scaly eruption, extending to the angles of the lips; and its body was covered with copper-coloured spots. My inquiries of the woman respecting her own health, satisfied me that she had had the venereal disease, from which I apprehended she was not then entirely free. I directed half a grain of submuriate of mercury, with a few grains of pulv. tragac. comp., to be given to the child twice a day, and requested to see it again when the medicine should have been taken seven or eight days. The woman returned at the time appointed, and shewed me her infant much improved in health. Its fretfulness had ceased, and its voice could scarcely be called stridulous. The copper-coloured blotches were beginning to fade, and the eruption upon the chin was diminished. I advised the poor woman to persevere in the use of the medicine, till the dis-

ease should have entirely disappeared ; but I did not see her again.

Here I would remark, that infants in general bear the use of mercurials, even in doses that will often affect adults, without any apparent disturbance of the animal functions. I generally direct the dose above-mentioned to infants within a year old, in such cases as I have described, without producing any salivation, which, as far as my experience extends, is seldom excited in infants. When the bowels are in a lax state, I either join a quarter or half a minim of tincture of opium to each dose of the submuriate of mercury ; or give the *hydrargyrus cum cretâ*.

This disease is not unfrequently attended in infants with an extensive desquamation of the cuticle ; and sometimes makes its first appearance in this form, when the affection has taken place in utero.

Several instances have occurred amongst my patients, where the mother having been once affected with the disease, has communicated it to two, three, or even four children in succession ; each of them having the disease in a milder form than the preceding one : and this without any ground of suspicion, that the mother had received a fresh infection. This has happened in families where my attendance has been required in every

case of indisposition ; and where I have had the opportunity of being acquainted with every circumstance that an assistance at the time of delivery could afford me.

This progressive communication of disease to the foetus in utero has taken place, not only where the mother has received the infection in the ordinary way ; but also where the organs of generation have remained unaffected both in the husband and wife.

In the latter end of the year 1770, and the beginning of 1771, a blind woman, who gained her living by drawing the breasts of women during their confinement, became affected with ulcers at the angles of the lips, which were judged to be venereal. I saw the ulcers, and thought them to be of that description. She had drawn the breasts of a woman who was supposed to be labouring under the venereal disease, and the ulcers did not heal till they were treated as in a case of syphilis. Several women, whose breasts were drawn by this poor woman, became infected in the manner which I shall now describe.

Mrs. B. had her breasts drawn twice by this woman, upon the death of her second child, which died of the small-pox, and within three or four weeks afterwards perceived a swelling of the axillary glands, and complained of soreness in her

throat. She consulted the late Mr. Billam, a judicious surgeon, who assured her that the disease affecting her throat was venereal, and treated it agreeably to that opinion. During this treatment she became pregnant; but continued the use of the medicines prescribed, till she arrived at the fifth month of her pregnancy. At the end of the seventh month she miscarried of a dead child. I attended her during labour, and perceived nothing amiss in the vagina or contiguous parts. She assured me that these parts had never been affected with disease, and that previously to this confinement she had borne three healthy children.

She became pregnant again in 1772; continued to enjoy good health; and was delivered on February 26th, 1773, of a child apparently healthy, which she herself suckled. When the child was about six weeks old, an eruption which I judged to be syphilitic, appeared upon its legs and arms. I immediately put both the mother and child upon a mercurial course, giving the former small doses of *hydrar. submur.*, and the latter *hydrar. cum cretâ*. By this treatment the child was in a short time freed from the eruption; but continued to take the medicine till the beginning of August.

In October following, two or three small ulcers appeared on the outside of the labia pudendi of the child, and on this account the mercurial course was resumed, with the addition of an occasional

dose of hydrar. submurias. The ulcers were soon healed; but in May 1774, the nostrils became sore, and the integuments of the nose were also tender. At the same time the voice of the child grew hoarse; the mercurial course was repeated, and continued for two months. The child also took the medicines during part of the months of September and October; after which time there was no recurrence of disease.

In June 1775, Mrs. B. bore another child, which was apparently healthy at its birth, and continued to be so for a few weeks. Blotches of a copper colour then appeared upon the skin; but soon disappeared upon having recourse to the mercurial medicines. After some time* the blotches appeared again, and were accompanied with a small ulcer in the labium pudendi, as in the former case. The child was, however, completely cured by a repetition of the treatment, and remained well.

It is scarcely necessary to transcribe any more cases of this kind from my notes, or from recollection. I will only add, that one patient who had received the disease in the way last-mentioned, was so offended with my using the term *venereal*, that she put herself under the care of another surgeon, whose opinion, however, coincided with my own.

* The time is not specified in my notes; but it did not exceed a few months.

Four successive children which this woman bore, were affected in the same manner.

It has appeared to me from several instances, that a man may communicate the lues venerea, after all symptoms of the disease have been removed, and he is judged to be in perfect health.

A few years ago a gentleman requested to speak with me in private. He was no sooner seated in my study, than he burst into a flood of tears, and seemed to be in the greatest distress. As soon as he could regain his composure, he informed me, that he had married a lady whom he tenderly loved, and now feared that he had injured her by communicating the venereal disease, which he acknowledged to have had before marriage, but from which he believed himself to have been since that time perfectly free. I saw no reason to doubt the truth of his declaration.

I visited his lady, and found her labouring under a confirmed lues. The labia pudendi, and verge of the anus, were beset with irregular fissures and condylomata; a discharge of puriform matter also issued from the vagina. She was advanced to the seventh month of pregnancy; but before her delivery at the termination of the ninth month, the diseased parts were healed, as I had pursued a mercurial course with as much vigour as seemed prudent in her condition.

The child was at its full growth, and had no other morbid appearance than an universal desquamation of the cuticle. It continued well about a month, and then began to grow extremely fretful; though its evacuations indicated no disease in the primæ viæ. At the same time it began to have a hoarse squeaking voice, and soon exhibited a number of copper-coloured blotches upon the skin. A scaly eruption also appeared upon the chin; and the anus shewed an unnatural redness. I had no hesitation respecting the treatment, but immediately commenced the mercurial course described in the first case above-mentioned. The event was agreeable to my wishes, and the child soon got well.

Soon after the restoration of the child's health, the family removed to another part of the county. Within half a year after their departure from the neighbourhood of Leeds, I received a letter from the lady, informing me that the child's complaint had returned again, and requesting a prescription for the medicines which had before effected so speedy a cure. I complied with her request, and since that time have heard nothing from the family.

Should any doubt arise upon a perusal of these cases, whether I have given the proper name to the disease herein described, I would beg leave

to submit the following considerations to your judgment.

When the notice of syphiloid diseases was first laid before the public by Mr. Hunter, the chief force of his argumentation was derived from this consideration, that although the diseases had a considerable resemblance to syphilis, yet being cured without mercury, they were thereby proved to be of a different nature. Now if this reasoning is allowed to have validity, we may suppose the converse of it also to be valid. If the disease in question have the usual symptoms of syphilis, and will yield to no other remedy than mercury, we may fairly conclude that it is syphilitic. What is our design in giving distinct names to diseases, but that we may thereby be directed to select the appropriate remedy for their cure? If my patient obtain the desired benefit from my nomenclature, a defect in my theory may well be excused.

It may justly excite surprise, that the gentleman whose case I have last related, should have remained free from disease, when his wife was in the condition which I have described. I confess myself unable to account for this circumstance, without calling in the aid of a supposition which wants probability. I have related all that I know of the case, and must leave the solution of the difficulty to your better judgment.

As I do not mean to enter upon an examination of the distinctions which have of late years been made betwixt genuine syphilis and syphiloid diseases; I trust I shall not be considered as having, by the preceding observations, expressed any doubt of the accuracy of those distinctions. I rejoice to see the ardour and judgment with which every branch of medical science is now cultivated; and must ever rank myself amongst the pupils of those, who by their discoveries and successful labours, are daily diminishing the sufferings of mankind.

I remain, Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM HEY.

To JOHN PEARSON, Esq.