C A S E S

OF

ICHTHYOSIS SPURIA VEL SEBACEA.

BY

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Received June 17th.—Read June 23rd, 1863.

It is, I believe, commonly agreed that the term ichthyosis 'vera' should be restricted to cases in which the surface of the body assumes more or less the character of that of certain fishes, by reason of a diseased condition of the papillary and epidermal elements of the skin. In this condition, the superficial scaly and scabrous appearance, modified as it may be in various subjects according to circumstances, is due to an increased amount and altered state of the epidermis. The term ichthyosis sebacea or spurious ichthyosis is, on the contrary, applied to a class of cases in which there exists a somewhat similar appearance¹ to the above-mentioned condition of the surface of the body, which is, however, due (not to any affection of the skin itself or of the epidermis, but) to an increased and unhealthy secretion

¹ Mr. Erasmus Wilson very justly describes the appearance of the ichthyosis sebacea as reminding one of the skin of the saurian reptile rather than of that of the fish; and therefore adopts the term sauriderma as synonymous with ichthyosis sebacea.

of the proper sebaceous matter of the follicles. This augmented secretion accumulating, "caking" (so to say), becoming indurated and discoloured by dust admixed, becomes also adherent to, although having no organic connection with, the subjacent surface of the skin; and the skin proper, though not in any way primarily or fundamentally affected, may yet in a secondary manner become irritated or inflamed by contact with the depraved secretion, and even assume the appearances of some active disease such as eczema.

Both forms of ichthyosis are happily tolerably infrequent in this island, and it is their comparative rareness¹ which induces me to bring before this Society the following cases, two of which came under my care in St. George's Hospital in the month of August, 1861.

The two cases alluded to occurred in the persons of two sisters, aged respectively ten and fourteen years, from an outlying hamlet a few miles distant from London, enjoying good general health, and comely in look. It appeared that they had both been vaccinated five years previously, and that after vaccination they both had become the subjects of a scattered pustular eruption on various parts of the body, which assumed the form of open and unhealthy sores. These sores disappeared in the course of some time, and then a roughness and hardness became noticeable about the arms and down the legs, and subsequently just above the axillæ, on the chest, and on the upper arms near the elbows. This condition gradually increased until it assumed the appearances presented by the patients on their admission into the hospital, which was as follows:

Description of the arms and legs.—Large patches of the skin on the front of the chest immediately above the axillæ, as also on both sides of the trunk over the false ribs, and about both knees, as also down both legs (especially in the neighbourhood of the ankles) as well as on the dorsum of the feet, were of a brown colour, so dark in some parts as to

¹ I cannot, upon inquiry, find that the practice of St. George's Hospital has, until now, ever produced a single case of this affection during the experience of those now connected with it.

be almost black. These discoloured portions were very rough and indurated, owing to masses of dry material covering the surface of the skin, which had the appearance, in consequence of the movement of the parts, of having become broken into scales or small tabular or lozenge-shaped patches, chiefly of a square form, and divided by deep lines according to the natural creasings of the skin. Owing to these concretions the surface was extremely dry and harsh. Down the legs and arms the concretion had less of a scaly form, and more of a papillary character. In some parts at the sides of the knees the affected portions reminded one of the dried and roughened sole of the fowl's foot. After a time these tabular scales became loosened, as will be described further on.

Course and treatment of the disease.—The two patients were placed on ordinary diet, with porter. At first I gave to both of them the liquor galii aparines every six hours, and had them put in a warm bath daily. Subsequent to the warm bath each day, the whole skin was well rubbed over with plain lard. Under these means the indurated and desiccated scales soon became loosened, and began to fall away from the skin, being found in abundance in the patients' beds. I soon discontinued the liquor galii, wishing to rely solely on local remedies; and continuing the daily warm bath, substituted a lotion of diluted liquor potassæ for the rubbing in of lard. This lotion was applied freely, and appeared to induce even a quicker removal of the sebaceous matter than did the application of the lard: so that by degrees the whole of the caked sebaceous matter was quite removed from the skin, which, though for a time it remained rather harsh and reddened, and somewhat tender, eventually regained its natural colour and suppleness. This was so with both the girls, who, accordingly, were discharged, in about five weeks, quite free from the affection, and with instructions again to visit the hospital in case that appearances of any return of the ailment manifested themselves. This recommendation as respects one of the patients was taken; for on going into one of the wards of the hospital in December last, I acci-

dentally met with the youngest of the two sisters as an inmate under the care of my colleague, Dr. Fuller, for the same disease as before. It appeared, upon inquiry, that both she and her sister had remained scot-free from the skin disease for between three and four months after leaving the hospital; but after that period they both became affected by a return of it, and exactly in the same parts as when they were first attacked.

Its recurrence was, however, not preceded by any ulcers of the skin as on the former occasion. This patient during her second sojourn in the hospital became quite free from the ichthyosis under the use of arsenic and hot baths, and the liq. galii aparines, but the skin remained unusually red and glazed, and disposed to crack.

With regard to the ultimate composition of the sebaceous concretion which was loosened and removed from the skin, I was anxious to ascertain how far it might correspond with an analysis made some years ago by Dr. Owen Rees of a black sebaceous secretion from a patient whose case is related by Mr. Erasmus Wilson in the fifth edition of his work 'On Diseases of the Skin;' and accordingly asked my friend Dr. Harvey, our medical registrar at St. George's Hospital, kindly to undertake the examination of a quantity of it. The account which he gives me of its chemical character is as follows:

Chemical examination.—On incineration, 8 per cent. of ash was obtained. Ether readily dissolved out a very large quantity of fat. Caustic potash dissolved an albuminous substance which was precipitated by acid. In the ash were detected lime, soda, sulphuric acid, phosphoric acid, and iron. The result of this analysis does not materially differ from that obtained by Dr. O. Rees.

Microscopical examination of the scales from the skin.—On examination with the half-inch eye-piece, the small scales had a brownish colour, and semi-opaque appearance, and presented an irregular outline, and a surface without any definite structural character. With a higher power (the quarter-inch) the edges of the portions when teased

out (after being softened with water) were seen to present a striated and wavy character ; and the general mass, chiefly structureless and homogeneous, was found to contain, in addition to what was no doubt "dirt" admixed, a number of irregularly-shaped, but mainly round and oval, reddish-coloured, solid-looking bodies, having a crystalline appearance, along with numbers of evidently old and worn-out epithelial cells. On the addition of dilute acetic acid, much of the striated character above described was obviously due to layers of epithelium compressed closely together, which swelled out and became of a much paler colour. The amorphous material also became much paler, and presented numbers of irregularly-shaped bodies, some being very minute and of a rod-shape, others being not unlike altered nuclei. A quantity of the material showing the linear parallel and wavy lines was seen not to be altered by the addition of the dilute acetic acid, the fibrillar elements remaining as before. Nothing existed more resembling a structural formation. On adding dilute liquor potassæ, the entire structure became much softened and reduced to a pulpy mass, in which much of the striated or fibrillar character was quite lost.

The general appearances of the diseased skin in these two patients may be seen in the drawing of one of the feet (see Plate XI), which I had made by Dr. Westmacott. This gentleman has informed me that the only other drawing of the same diseased condition which, in his large experience, he has made or ever saw, was executed by him in Canada, in 1849, and taken from the case of a woman aged eighty years, whose legs were, in addition to the disease in question, the seat of dusky-coloured scars and stains of old ulcers.

I would, in conclusion, take the liberty of alluding to an interesting instance of the same affection related in the 'Annalen des Charité Krankenhauses,' Bd. ix, Hft. i, p. 89, by Dr. R. Biefel, in connection with which the author considers the literature of the disease. This case is illustrated by drawings, one of which, showing a magnified view of a patch of the diseased part, very remarkably resembled Dr.

Westmacott's drawing of the old Canadian woman's foot. In the instance related by Dr. Biefel, however, it will be seen that the subcutaneous tissues subsequently became deeply affected, and thus the entire diseased parts greatly modified. Judging from the condition which the skin, in the little patient's case above related, was beginning to assume when she was discharged from the hospital after her second visit, it seems not improbable that in her case also the proper textures of the skin may, under repeated attacks of this spurious ichthyosis, become the seat of organic changes, as in the case related by Dr. Biefel.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE XI.

Ichthyosis sebacea in the foot of a young girl, Martha B—, who was under Dr. John W. Ogle's care in St. George's Hospital, August, 1861.