ON THE
REMOVAL BY OPERATION
OF A
HAIRY MOLE OCCUPYING HALF THE
FOREHEAD.

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THE fact that surgeons not unfrequently decline to treat by operation large hairy moles, fearing that the disfigurement produced either by the knife or caustics might be worse than the disease, will, I trust, seem a sufficient excuse for bringing the present brief communication before the Society.

The patient, whose case forms the text of this paper, (M. G—), ten years old, was admitted into St. Bartholomew's Hospital under my care, in February 1873, on account of a large congenital hairy mole on the forehead.

The mole occupied rather more than half the forehead, extending from the hairy scalp to the eyebrow, and from the temple to the middle line, and a little beyond it. Its greatest diameter (from side to side) was three inches and a half, and its vertical diameter two inches and three quarters. The integument composing it was deeply pigmented, being of a

dark, blackish-brown tint, with a very uneven surface, especially below and to the left, where it was mammillated or almost warty. A quantity of brown coarse hairs grew from nearly every part of the surface, being thickly planted, as in the case of the hairy scalp, and many of them an inch or two in length. In the centre of the patch was a small area of almost white skin, like scar-tissue, the hairs growing from which were also of a lighter tint than the rest.

The mole was vascular, and, it was said, always bled profusely when in any way hurt; but it had only grown in proportion to the rest of the body. (See Plate III, fig. 1.)

The child was in good health, and well grown for her age, and, excepting the almost startling deformity produced by the mole, good looking.

I was unable to find any account of the successful employment of measures for the removal of so large a mole, and the treatment to be adopted could be, therefore, only experimental. It appeared to me, however, that with care, it would be impossible to make matters worse, and an attempt to improve them would be quite justifiable.

A few days after the patient's admission into the hospital I began the treatment, after the patient was put under the influence of chloroform, by cutting off a small portion of the surface of the mole as smoothly as possible with a sharp scalpel; taking care, while cutting away both the epidermis and corium, not to remove the whole thickness of the latter, in order that the subcutaneous tissue might be left untouched, and thus such contraction as is apt to follow its destruction might be prevented. Free but not excessive bleeding occurred from every part of the cut surface. It was controlled easily by a pad and bandage.

Two days afterwards the dressing was removed and the surface allowed to form a scab, which was not touched for several days.

March 21st (a month after the operation).—The wound had healed with a good scar, which was thin and red, but not pigmented. Some new hairs are beginning to grow from the surface, but not so thickly as before, especially at the

spots at which the knife had gone most deeply. There was no contraction.

March 26th.—Encouraged by the result of the first operation, and especially by the total absence of any contraction of the scar, which was as smooth as the neighbouring healthy skin, I now attacked the remainder of the mole with the knife, cutting away the whole of its surface, including, as before, both the cuticle and part of the cutis vera, but not exposing, except here and there to a very small extent, the subcutaneous tissue. The bleeding was controlled by a pad of lint and a bandage, and after a day or so the wound was left to heal by itself under a scab, such discharge as there was being allowed to escape by occasionally raising the edge of the scab.

In less than a month after the second operation the wound was almost completely healed. The scar was smooth and not pigmented, but hairs had begun to crop up again pretty freely from its surface.

So far as it went the result of these operations was satisfactory, especially in regard to the proof they afforded that large portions of skin could be removed without consequent contraction and deformity of neighbouring parts. But it was evident that the skin must be destroyed to a greater depth in order to get rid of the larger hair-follicles.

May 23rd.—Nitric acid was applied to a small portion of the surface, the scab produced by the acid being left untouched, and little or no dressing of any kind applied.

Nitric acid was again applied to another portion June 28th. At this date it was noted that there was a slight reappearance of brown pigmentation near the lower border of the scar.

The caustic was again applied freely to the upper portion of the mole August 29th, and a few days afterwards the patient was discharged from the hospital for a few weeks.

On her readmission, October 1st, the upper part of the mole was found still covered by the scab produced by the nitric acid. The lower part was pinkish and smooth, with a considerable number of fine hairs still growing from it.

In December the scab, which had been left to itself almost

entirely, had fallen off, and the scarred surface was now pink and glazed. In some parts fine hairs were still springing up. There was not the slightest contraction.

Dec. 28th.—Several spots, from which fine hairs were growing, were touched with nitric acid, and the patient was discharged from the hospital with a promise of readmission in a few months.

June 29th, 1874.—At this date the patient was readmitted into the hospital. Her appearance was very much improved. Very few hairs, comparatively, now grew from any part of the scarred surface, and those present were of much smaller size than their predecessors, and of a lighter colour.

The scar had become more like normal skin, although still looking glazed.

Glacial acetic acid was applied to some of the spots at which hair was still growing (July 6th), but the remedy seemed scarcely strong enough, and nitric acid was applied July 21st.

September 22nd.—The scabs had fallen off at this date from the lower part of the forehead, leaving smooth scar-tissue, thin and supple, and with only a few hairs growing from the surface.

The patient left the hospital soon afterwards, and was not readmitted until—

February, 1876.—At this time a marked improvement was perceptible. The greater part of the disease had quite disappeared. The scar was smooth and supple, and there was not the slightest contraction or dragging on neighbouring parts. A few small pigmented and slightly hairy spots were still present here and there.

Several of these spots were treated by epilation and the application of nitric acid, a drop of the acid being applied, and, after standing for a few moments, being soaked off with blotting-paper. This was done on two or three occasions, and the patient was discharged June 11th.

On her readmission at the beginning of last month (October, 1877), it was evident that the mole had almost entirely disappeared, the only traces of its presence being a tiny patch

here and there of slightly pigmented skin, with a very few fine hairs, almost imperceptible except on close inspection, growing from them.

The scar-tissue is now smooth, whitish, glazed and supple, quite level with the adjoining healthy integument, and not in the least degree contracted, or dragging in the least on neighbouring parts.

Some of the hairs I have attempted to remove with their papillæ, by means of the point of a small tenotomy knife, on one or two occasions; but with this exception, and the removal of the small slice of skin just at the edge of the hairy scalp, nothing has been done since her readmission.

A photograph, taken in the last week of October, shows well the slight amount of disfigurement which now remains (see Plate III, fig. 2). No photograph was taken before the beginning of the treatment, but a photograph of the drawing which was made at this time is placed, for comparison, by the side of the photograph recently taken from life (see Plate III, fig. 1).

So far as I can discover, this is the largest hairy mole which has been completely removed by operation.

The point of most surgical importance seems to lie in the fact that so large a piece of integument as half that of the forehead can be removed without contraction of neighbouring parts. It is, of course, easy to be wise after the event; but to most surgeons such an entire absence of contraction as there is in the present case will be, I venture to think, as much a matter of surprise as it was to myself. It is impossible to say to what depth the destructive action of the caustic extended, or, in other words, whether the whole thickness of the cutis was destroyed, or what amount, in addition, of the subcutaneous tissue. It is possible that the hair-producing power of the hair-papillæ and their follicles may have been destroyed by something short of complete removal of their whole texture; for in the absence of a supposition of this kind it is not easy to understand how the growth of hair could have been prevented, except by such destruction of the subcutaneous tissue in which the larger

hair-follicles are seated as must have led to contraction when the wound was healed.

With regard to the methods of treatment adopted in this particular case, there must be also some doubt as to the relative amount of good done by the knife and the caustic. The result of the first operations (with the knife) quite confirmed the idea which led me to perform them, viz. that a large portion of skin may be cut away without fear, if the incisions are confined, or nearly so, to the cutis vera; and the hint may prove useful in cases in which the disease is superficial enough to be thus removed. In the present case, however, the pigment-forming tendency inherited by the new cuticle was too strong to be thus eradicated completely, and the larger hair-papillæ were, of course, too deeply seated. It is quite possible that a repetition of the operation by cutting, without any application of caustic, would have sufficed in the end for the cure of the disease; but this must remain for the present doubtful. My object in changing the method from the knife to caustic was partly to experiment with one as against the other, and partly because it seemed not unlikely that the liquid caustic might find its way into the hair-follicles, and thus affect, to a slightly deeper level than the general surface of the integument, those structures which one wished more particularly to attack.

I am disposed to attribute some part, at least, of the evenness of surface and absence of contraction of the scar to the fact that the scab was allowed to remain untouched until the wound beneath was soundly healed.

The process of healing by what may be termed the natural method—by scabbing, is less often adopted, I am disposed to believe, than it should be; and the result of this method in other superficial wounds than those now the subject of inquiry, as, for example, in slight burns or like injuries, confirms me in this belief.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE III.

Removal by Operation of a Hairy Mole (W. Morrant Baker).

Fig. 1. Photograph from a drawing taken in 1872.

Fig. 2. Photograph from life (1877) after removal.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.