LECTURES ON DERMATOLOGY.

DELIVERED AT

The Royal College of Surgeons of England.

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LECTURE VI.—*Concluded.*

It is important to remember that eczema prevails at every period of life, from infancy to extreme old age, and, consequently, that the treatment will be very much influenced by the age and constitution of the patient. As a general expression, it may be stated that the eczematous affections take their origin in lowered vitality or debility, and that the aim of our treatment should be—to restore health. But the conditions of debility necessarily vary at different periods of existence. In infancy and childhood, the cause of debility will be defective nutrition or defective nutritive power; in the adult and at middle age, the cause will very probably be malassimilation from derangement of the digestive functions; while in old age and in certain adults of highly nervous temperament, the cause of eczema will be a malassimilation determined by irritability and waste.

Thus, with a patient before us suffering under eczema infantile, we must inquire carefully into the diet of the child: it has probably failed to obtain its natural food, and recourse has been had to bringing it up by hand. Then we must draw on our resources bearing upon the nutrition of infancy—the substitutes for mother's milk, the wheaten flour, the beef-tea, the cod-liver oil; in such a case the best nurse will prove to be the best physician. A similar principle of treatment carries us through the whole of the nutritive period of life from infancy until the full development of the body is perfected by growth. We may find many intercurrent sources of debility intruding upon the steadfast stream of our course; but our aim should always be to perfect, as far as we are able, by diet, by hygienic measures, and by medicines, the healthy nutrition and development of the organisation. We may be interrupted by the successive trials of vaccination, of teething, of infantile diseases, of scanty or deficient food, of growth; but we must be ready to appreciate every condition predisposing to exhaustion, and apply in good season and judiciously the appropriate remedy.

If the powers of constitution of our patient be equal to the proper digestion and proper assimilation of the improved diet, our purpose is accomplished, the cure is certain and rapid; but the nutritive power may be weak, in which case it will be necessary to find some means of giving it strength. Such a means we possess in arsenic combined with iron; and there is no medicine more harmless, more certain in its effect, and more successful, than arsenic. The dose for an infant of a month or six weeks old may be one minim of Fowler's solution, equal to the $\frac{1}{150}$ of a grain of arsenious acid—a dose far too minute to do harm, although capable of doing wonders in the way of good; and we may in the course of a few days increase the dose to a minim and a half or two minims. I have for many years prescribed arsenic in a combination, which I have found so safe, so efficacious, and so convenient, that I have been unwilling either to vary the remedy or the formula. The latter is as follows.

R Vini ferri ʒiiss; syripi simplicis ʒiij; liquoris arsenicalis ʒj; aquæ anethi ʒij. Misce. One drachm, with meals, three times a day.

Let me recapitulate: firstly, we should cover every visible part of the eruption, whatever its state, and avoiding only the hairy scalp, with the benzoated zinc-ointment in combination with spirits of wine; secondly, we should examine carefully into the diet, and direct such a regimen as in our opinion is most likely to be nutritive; and thirdly, we should administer from one to two minims of Fowler's solution in the combination already mentioned, three times in the day, with the single condition that the medicine should be given on a full stomach, and stopped immediately if it chance to disagree. Two other points, but of secondary importance, follow upon this course of treatment. It is well to see that the bowels act regularly. With an unsuitable diet it is hardly probable that digestion will be complete; but nothing short of constipation need delay the commencement of the curative treatment.

The other point opens up a question as to the derivative influence of eczema: that it is derivative in infancy is more than improbable, and I should no more hesitate to arrest an ichorous discharge from the skin than I should a chronic diarrhoea from the intestinal canal. Nevertheless, it is always wise to be on our guard; and if any apparent incon-

venience arise from the sudden closure of the outlet through the skin, it might immediately be removed by the administration of one grain of calomel with one grain of sugar, dropped into the mouth or upon the tongue.

The usual issue of the treatment now mentioned is a speedy and effectual cure; and very rarely, indeed, have I met with a chronic prolongation of the disease, and even more rarely with a fatal termination of the case. Whenever the latter has occurred, it has resulted from bronchitis or convulsions. Bronchitis is intimately associated with eczema—in fact, is neither more nor less than an eczema of the bronchial mucous membrane, and of course has its dangers; whereas convulsions may seize on the delicate organisation of infancy, excited by a very trivial cause, such as mere indigestion or the cutting of a tooth, and cannot therefore be regarded as a direct consequence of eczema. On the contrary, it may be reasonably predicted that convulsions would be less likely to attack an eczematous child than one in apparent good health.

In eczema, as it occurs at the age of childhood, and thence upwards to early manhood, the principle of constitutional management already described, namely, the restoration of power by diet, by hygienic measures, and by tonic remedies, may be regarded as the universal plan of treatment and unailing in its results. In society we find many difficulties thrown in our way in the carrying out of our intentions, and greatest of all that which accompanies the educational period of life. The educational period is also the growing period; and it would seem to demand no great stretch of judgment to understand that during growth every kind of animal, whether human or brute, if it be expected to attain the full expansion of development and strength appropriate to the perfect standard of its class, must be thoroughly well fed. Childhood and youth are the season during which the structure must be raised, and the building cannot be solidly established without a sufficiency of material. Some of our education-farmers seem to think differently, and if we are to credit them, the best way to furnish the mind is to starve the body; they would seem to pin their faith on the belief that an exhausted body is an active absorbent of learning of every kind. Not unfrequently we have to contend with this folly on the part of parents, who appear to be taken by surprise by the announcement that abundant food is a necessary institution of our social fabric. The same unreasoning prejudice has created an opposition to beer, the very mother's milk of our people, and yet we have never heard of a mother, who was able to digest it, who did not make beer the basis of nourishment of her infant. Vastly well has it answered the purpose in this island up to the present time, and will, I believe, long continue to do the same.

When we contemplate the splendid works of the great masters of the painter's art, and watch the man with his little daubs of colour ranged in proper order around his palette, the thought comes upon us over and over again of the simplicity of the means through which such admirable results have been attained; but the same means in the hands of the uninitiated must end in disgraceful failure. May we not transfer these same thoughts from painting to medicine? Our means may indeed be extremely simple, but how few can employ them with a perfect result; and yet I believe that a steady and conscientious determination is all that is necessary for the attainment of complete success. For the cure of trophopathic eczema, the eczema of the nutritive period of life, all that is needed is food—food in diet, food in medicine—for arsenic and iron are both food; and food externally by means of a palliative protection to the skin.

When we have passed the nutritive period of life, we are brought into contact with other predisposing causes of eczema. There is the exhaustion of childbirth and nursing; there are anxieties and afflictions of various kinds; there are great struggles in the battle of life, and there are its undeserved reverses. All these causes depress the nervous power and the physical vitality of the body, and they subject the skin to the invasion of eczema. If we gird ourselves to its treatment and cure, we find our minds travelling over similar ground to that which we have already traversed. The important questions of hygienics, of palliatives externally, and tonics of every kind within, are still the subject of our thoughts; and if we have to deal with chronic stages of the disease, then we shall require the aid of arsenic and external stimulants.

There is no phase of eczema which is so deeply interesting as that which comes before us at the full maturity of age, when eczema presents itself as the manifestation of a disorder of the digestive functions, when it appears before the whip of our body's greatest friend, and sometimes tormentor, the liver, or when it obeys very obviously a derivative influence. Over and over again we hear speak of nausea, of want of appetite, of torpid excretion, annoying the individual for days or for weeks, and ending in an outbreak of eczema as sudden as an exanthema. At other times the invasion of the eczema is slow in its progress and more partial in its effects; but a little retrospective search discovers

some foregone dyspepsia, or neuralgia, or rheumatism, or gout, which may have wholly disappeared under the new dispensation. Such cases are especially incidental to the present period of life, and their treatment may be framed upon a plan as routine in its character as that which we have heretofore laid down for the previous groups.

We have no longer to search out the most nutritive diet that can be attained, but rather to shear it of its redundancy. We have to regulate digestion, to facilitate movement along the alimentary canal, and relieve the liver of its overburden of duty. It is remarkable how quickly a sudden and particularly an accidental eczema will yield to this method of treatment; but cases of a chronic character will require a more assiduous pressure. In the former cases the blending of a mild saline purgative with a bitter infusion, and the addition of iron and quinine, will remove all the symptoms of the eruption in the course of a few days; while in the latter a mild purgative treatment must be succeeded by a more or less prolonged course of tonics; and in the end it may be necessary to call in the aid of a nerve-tonic, which experience has proved to have a powerful influence in giving vigour to the skin, namely, arsenic.

It is an old naval saw, that if there were no storms and no shipwrecks every old woman would be going to sea; and something similar may be said with regard to medicine. If medicine were a mere routine we should have curers of disease without end, where at present we have few. We need all our judgment, all our knowledge, all our tact, to become good and successful practitioners of medicine. We must be ready to confront every irregularity in the course or in the manifestation of disease; and we must, above all, exercise sound common sense, which we shall always find our best ally in helping us out of the difficulties that beset our path.

I may repeat that too little or too much food, weak assimilation or perverted assimilation, may each and all be the cause of eczema; as also may loss of the natural food with incompetent substitutes in the infant, deficient and unsuitable food at the growing period of life, and excess of food in proportion to the powers of digestion at mature age. Assimilation, again, and sanguification, may be impeded or perverted by the illnesses belonging to every season of life; to the earliest period, when nutrition is active; to the mature period, when the nutritive changes are indolent and sluggish; and to the declining stage of life, when waste is the preponderant movement. These considerations and many more will have their weight in our minds in dealing with the treatment of the eczematous affections, and will be our best guide in adapting the details and modification of our curative measures to the varieties which the disease may present. We may hold it as an axiom, that whatever strengthens the body and restores the health will at the same time be the best cure of eczema.

Passing away from general eczema to the eczema occasioned by the presence of the acarus, namely, scabies, it will occur to you that, as the cause is local, and as the art of curing disease is the removal of the cause, we shall have no need of internal remedies in scabies, but may confide in some of the well-known means of destroying the life of the animalcule and its ova. This is literally true: a little sulphur-ointment rubbed into the burrows of the animal and into its haunts is speedily destructive of its life; and then, moderate care with reference to cleanliness and ablution complete the cure. The acarus is highly sensitive to the lethal influence of certain substances. Among these substances, and first on the list, is sulphur, another is stavesacre, a third styra; but no purpose would be gained by multiplying their enumeration. The acarus is an air-breather, and one of the peculiar instincts of the creature is the provision which it makes for ventilating its dwelling-place. Now fat and oils of all kinds are known to suffocate air-breathing animals by entering their spiracles and obstructing the aperture through which they receive air—hence greasy substances alone are natural cures of itch, although their force and certainty may be increased by an admixture of sulphur or stavesacre.

The modern treatment of scabies, such as I practise it myself, is extremely simple. I require my patient to wash the whole body night and morning with sulphur-soap; to use sulphur-soap to the hands for ordinary ablution in lieu of common soap; to rub a little sulphur-ointment thoroughly into the hands, the wrists, and between the fingers, at bedtime, and at the same time to smear a little of the ointment on any part of the body where there may be itching. There is no occasion to suspend the ordinary associations and avocations of the patient; there is no need of isolating him; the first inunction will destroy in a few hours every existing acarus; if any escape, the repetition of the same plan for a few nights is sufficient; and by these repetitions the ova are equally effectually deprived of life.

The quantity of sulphur-ointment necessary for the cure of scabies is marvellously small, and its odour may be covered by a few drops of the essential oil of camomile, which is also a parasiticide. The vapour of sulphur exhaled from the skin disinfects the clothes, and the patient

himself becomes for a while a disinfectant towards those with whom he associates. It is, of course, important that ablution should be rigorous in respect of all articles of clothing which admit of washing; and woollen clothes must either be laid aside for a while and sprinkled with sulphur, or submitted to the action of a high temperature.

Sulphur demands a little caution in its use, in consequence of its tendency to irritate the skin. This, however, can only occur when the substance is roughly employed; and in such cases it may be necessary to suspend its application and employ some milder remedy. In the instance of infants, the sulphur soap, used twice in the day, with the gentle inunction of lard scented with the oil of camomile, is often quite sufficient for effecting a cure; and in adults with a sensitive skin, the unguentum staphisagriae will generally prove effectual without any other sulphur than that of the soap. In public institutions, it will be necessary to see the sulphur treatment properly performed; and, when there is evidence of an abundant colony of acari, the ointment may be more extensively employed. There is a process enforced in the Belgian army which is little worthy of imitation, but which is so far an improvement on the old method that it is capable of restoring a soldier to his duty the instant it is completed. It is called the two-hour cure, and is performed as follows. The patient is thoroughly rubbed down with soft soap for half an hour; he is then soaked and washed with warm water for another half-hour, so as to get rid of the soap and no little of the epidermis; in the next place, he is scrubbed with the solutio sulphuris cum calce for a third half-hour; and within the remaining half-hour his dress is replaced, and he is delivered back to his military quarters.

It may be as well to bear in mind, in connexion with the sulphur treatment, that scabies is an eczema; and that eczema is a simple inflammation of the skin, susceptible of being excited by every kind of irritant. In very sensitive constitutions, the sulphur treatment might prove to be sufficient of an irritant to excite an ordinary eczema; and in this way, in addition to a vexatious aggravation, the diagnosis might be seriously complicated. And, besides, there is another possibility that may be assumed: the patient may possess an eczematous diathesis, perhaps an inherited diathesis, in which case a troublesome eczema may follow upon the incautious employment of remedies intended for the cure of scabies. Not unfrequently this very result is experienced; and sometimes an intractable lichen follows the treatment of scabies, and, together with eczema, is classed as a sequela of that disease.

OBSTETRIC MEMORANDA.

BLEEDING IN URÆMIC PUERPERAL CONVULSIONS.

IN THE BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL for 1863, I published five consecutive cases of puerperal convulsions successfully treated by venesection. The following case of uræmic poisoning affords further proof of the efficacy of bleeding in such cases.

A. Paget, a poor married woman, a primipara, aged 21, of small stature, in the ninth month of uterine gestation, was attended by a medical man (living near) on account of confused vision, pain in the head, and sickness. In the course of the night of February 20th, convulsions came on and occurred frequently, attended by loss of sight and complete insensibility. On the 21st, when her medical attendant saw her, uterine action was going on, and he left the case. I was from home when sent for, and my friend, Mr. Hogg, visited her in the evening. The convulsions had ceased, and he delivered her instrumentally. Next day my assistant attended her; she was quite blind and insensible; no urine had been passed. The usual remedies were applied. On the 23rd, her bowels had been freely acted upon, and she was a little better. The catheter was again required. On the 24th I was sent for, as her friends thought she was dying. I found her quite insensible. The pupils were fully dilated, and she was quite blind. The pulse was very quick; the breathing very feeble. There was no stertor. I took fifteen or sixteen ounces of blood from the arm. In the course of the night she passed urine and her motions under her. On the 25th, the pupils acted on the application of light. No urine had been passed. She could now take a dessert-spoonful of fluid at a time. The urine was removed, and found to be loaded with albumen. On the following day she appeared much better. At 9 P.M. I was sent for, on account of violent pain in the region of the uterus and vagina. Leeches, fomentations, and poultices, gave relief. The next morning she had passed urine and a quantity of muco-purulent matter from the vagina. On March 1st, when I saw her, she was going on favourably. On the 7th, her sister called to say that she was much better.

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