

V. *Observations on Pemphigus.* By Stephen Dickson, M. D. Fellow of the College of Physicians, and one of the King's Professors of Physic in the City of Dublin, M. R. I. A. &c. — From *The Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, 1787. 4to. Dublin.



Vera experientia nascitur e compluribus observationibus; magna diligentia, attentione & cura notatis, quæ integram morbi historiam, cum omnibus ad rem pertinentibus circumstantiis complectuntur.

HOFFMAN.



PEMPHIGUS is a disease of very rare occurrence, and many physicians, in extensive practice, have never met with an instance of it. However, six have fallen within my observation — three in Scotland, one in England, and two in this kingdom. I mention this circumstance as an apology for writing on this subject: had the same opportunities occurred to men of more enlarged experience, I should have been silent. I am also aware that uncommon cases are not the best subjects for medical inquiry; but they often serve to reflect light on those which are more usual; and besides, what-

ever affects human nature must naturally conciliate our attention.

Our best nosologist, Dr. Cullen, (to whom, by the by, no instance of this disease ever occurred) has classed pemphigus in the order of Exanthemata. This classification will certainly appear sufficiently proper to those who grant this Nosologist the latitude he allows himself in the arrangement of his genera. When the plague and petechial fever are allowed to be classed under different heads, and the thrush and scarlet fever under the same head, we need not contend about the place of pemphigus, even though we should find it not to be contagious, sometimes commencing and continuing without fever, and affecting persons more than once in the course of their lives. Dr. Cullen describes this disorder as follows: "A contagious fever, vesicles about the size of an almond* appearing
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* Dr. Cullen's words are, "*avellanæ magnitudine,*" i. e. "of the size of a filbert." This was the size of some of the largest vesicles in a well-marked instance of pemphigus that occurred lately to the Editor of this Journal at the Westminster General Dispensary. In this patient fresh pustules continued to appear, from time to time, for the space of six weeks; but the eruption was confined to the external surface

“ ing on the first, second, or third day of the
 “ disease, remaining for many days, and at
 “ length pouring out a thin ichor.”—I propose
 to amend his description in the following man-
 ner: *A fever, accompanied with the successive
 eruption from different parts of the body, internal
 as well as external, of vesicles about the size of an
 almond, which become turgid, with a faintly yel-
 lowish serum, and in three or four days subside.*
 I shall only observe at present, that I am by no
 means convinced of this disorder being conta-
 gious; that new vesicles arise, not only on the
 first, second, or third, but on every day of the
 disease; that I have never known them remain
 for many days; that the fluid they contain does
 not appear in general to be an ichor or sanies,
 but a bland, inodorous, insipid serum; and that
 instead of being poured out, it is most com-
 monly absorbed into the system.

No traces of this disease are discoverable in

of the body. A more particular account of this case, accom-
 panied with an engraving representing the appearance of the
 vesicles, may be expected soon from an ingenious Student of
 Physic (Mr. T. Christie) who means to make this disease the
 subject of an inaugural dissertation. — EDITOR.

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the writings either of the Greeks, Romans, or Arabians.

Bontius, in his account of the medicine of the Egyptians, mentions the case of his friend Cavallerius, who was seized with the epidemic dysentery that prevailed during the siege in Java, by Tommagon Bauraxa, in 1628. His disorder was accompanied with the eruption of cuticular vesicles, which were filled with a greenish pus, that eroded the skin underneath, even to the flesh. The patient died. It is evident that little can be concluded from this brief account.

Carolus Piso, in his 149th observation, accurately depicts the genuine pemphigus, as it appeared in the case of Egmont de Rinach, about an hundred and fifty years ago, at Nantz. He terms it hydatids, and says it occurred to him frequently : but I have reason to suspect that he confounds under the same name the chicken pox, a slight disorder, in which the skin is affected, not with spreading vesicles, but with small pustules. He seems also to confound with pemphigus some other erythematous affections ; for he says that these watery pustules frequently precede the eruption of the itch ; that they
sometimes

sometimes occur without fever, sometimes accompany continued fever, and sometimes appear in the beginning of intermittents. The truth is, that Pifo, though an industrious observer and a candid man, was by no means an acute nosologist. His account, however, of the case of Egmont de Rinach deserves attention, not only as being the first accurate and authentic description of this disease on record, but as pointing out a diversity in the habit of body then accompanying this disease from what has been since met with; for though Pifo declares that the vesicles in this case supervened on a putrid synochus, yet he says that he let blood in the beginning with great advantage, and earnestly recommends the same practice in similar cases. In every instance, however, that I have seen of this disorder, such a practice would have been plainly improper, if not pernicious.

The next author who mentions pemphigus is Morton. Speaking of the diseases which prevailed in London between 1682 and 1692, he mentions, among other fevers of a malignant type, some in which watery vesicles were scattered over the head and chest. These fevers, however, he says, were merely sporadic, and
not

not propagated by contagion, as in the pestilential constitution.

For the next authentic * account of pemphigus we are indebted to the observations of Sauvages. He first observed it in the hospital at Montpellier, in 1725, in a soldier who fell a victim to it. Afterwards he saw five other cases, chiefly of beggars, or other poor people, in all of which acute febrile symptoms were present. Twice, however, he saw it unattended with fever.

Lastly, Dr. Stewart, of Aberdeen, (in a letter to Dr. Duncan, which is inserted in the Medical Commentaries for 1778) mentions a case of pemphigus which occurred to him in the hospital in that town. A soldier had been ordered to march soon after he had been seized with the measles; the eruption was driven in by the cold, and in ten days afterwards the pemphigus appeared. The vesicles (the largest of which were snipped) poured out, at first, a semipellucid serum, but in the course of the disease discharged a bloody ichor. In this case the tendency to putrefaction was very strong; but the patient recovered by the liberal admini-

* See Culleni Nosol. Tom. II. G. xxxiv.

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stration of bark and wine. From this case I think we are justified in inferring that the nature of the fluid contained in the vesicles (however accurately it may be ascertained to be a pure serum in the beginning) may be so altered in the course of the disease, by its own fermentation, or by admixture with other fluids of the body, from their vessels being broken down, that it may at length cease to be a diagnostic symptom of this disorder.

But no author who has written on the subject of pemphigus has mentioned an extraordinary peculiarity of this disorder, which I have observed in two instances; namely, that the vesicles have taken possession of the internal parts of the body, and proceeded in succession (some rising while others decayed) from the mouth, downwards, through the whole surface of the alimentary canal.

The first case in which I had the opportunity of observing this singular and distressing symptom, was that of a woman under the care of Dr. Gregory, at the Infirmary of Edinburgh, in 1783. This woman's menses had been obstructed for two years and a half. During that period she had been thrice before attacked with the same disorder, which had each time super-

vened upon a vomiting of blood. Her skin was generally cool, and her pulse (though weak) never much increased in frequency. Peruvian bark and wine were administered to her liberally: by these and other occasional remedies she recovered.

The other case, in which vesicles appeared to have been formed internally, occurred to me lately in this town. I shall relate the particulars of it, as I think it worthy of observation.

— — —, aged twenty-three, of a delicate form and sanguine temperament, the wife of a man in tolerably good circumstances, and who had been about a fortnight ill of a low fever, was seized (after having suffered much fatigue in attending her husband) with pains in her back, head-ach, and tendency to vomit. — As I was attending her husband I saw the first approaches of her disorder, and, on the evening of the day she was first attacked, directed her to take an emetic, and to bathe her feet in warm water.

The next morning her skin was very hot; pulse frequent; head-ach not better; she had not slept, and complained of a sore throat: on inspection the uvula and tonsils appeared inflamed, and some mucus was collected in the
back

back of the fauces : she had had no stool for two days. I ordered a clyster immediately ; afterwards a gentle purgative ; tincture of roses for a gargle. In the evening all the symptoms were milder. The physic had operated twice. I ordered the pediluvium to be repeated.

Third day. She complained of a smarting, itching, and (as she expressed herself) tingling pain in her tongue and through the whole inside of her mouth. Her tongue was of a bright red colour, and dry, but clean. She was thirsty ; but complained that her drink was unpalatable, though acidulated with lemon juice. She had no moisture on her skin : had gone to stool once : slept tolerably well the night before : the febrile symptoms were mitigated, but the cynanche unabated. I ordered nothing but the saline julep.

Fourth day. There appeared on her tongue a pellucid vesicle of about an inch long, and near half an inch broad, turgid with a faintly yellowish serous fluid. A smaller one of the same kind appeared on the inside of the left cheek. The sensation which they occasioned she described as being similar to that which she had experienced before their eruption, but greater in degree, and somewhat as if they were

full of scalding water. This day her skin was cooler; but her pulse very weak, irregular, and about ninety in a minute. She had had two loose stools. I prescribed half a drachm of the red Peruvian bark, very finely powdered, to be taken every two hours in a goblet of wine and water. Imperial for common drink. The tincture of roses to be changed for an emollient gargle.

Fifth day. Three vesicles similar to the former appeared on her chest and right arm. Other symptoms nearly as before. Pulse not so feeble. Medicines were continued.

Sixth day. Her stomach rejected the bark. Two new vesicles appeared on her neck and cheek. Her breath was foetid. She had had some low delirium in the night. Pulse eighty-eight, and very weak. No sense of taste. I prescribed a decoction of bark, one ounce, in which should be dissolved half a drachm of vegetable alkali, to be taken every two hours; and immediately after each dose half an ounce of the same decoction mixed with six drachms of lemon juice. Cyder or porter for common drink.

Seventh day. There was little change. The medicines were continued.

Eighth

Eighth day. The vesicles on the inside of the mouth, and on the tongue, disappeared, and the cuticle which had been elevated was shrivelled, and of a brownish colour. Deglutition was difficult, and, as she said, painful through the whole inside of her throat. Pulse eighty, and rather stronger. Bowels regular. Medicines were continued.

Ninth day. The cuticle on the parts formerly occupied by vesicles on the inside of the cheek, and on the tongue, had cracked, and was peeling off: the parts underneath appeared raw and sore. Deglutition had now become so painful, that she refused medicine, food, and even drink. She could not bear the slightest pressure on the neck. A new vesicle appeared under her right ear. Some purulent matter appeared on the back of the pharynx, the origin of which, however, was not discernible. Pulse eighty-six, and of nearly the same strength. I prescribed a clyster of warm water: after its operation, another of new milk and decoction of bark, equal parts; the same to be repeated four hours afterwards. At night an anodyne clyster, with fifty drops of thebaic tincture. White liniment for the sores.

Tenth

Tenth day. The vesicles on the chest and right arm had disappeared. The fores of the tongue and cheek were of a darker colour, and seemed to be healing. Some new vesicles appeared on the abdomen. Pulse not so weak. She rested well the former part of the preceding night; but was disturbed by an accident, and afterwards was much inclined to rove in her discourse till morning. Medicines were continued.

Eleventh day. The symptoms were nearly the same as the day before. The vesicles on the neck and cheek had disappeared, and the cuticle in those parts was shrivelled and cracked. The epigastric region was extremely sore, and this soreness much increased by pressure. The last clyster of decoction of bark and milk administered the day before was not retained. I ordered salep to be substituted for milk; other medicines to be continued.

Twelfth day. She could swallow, though still not without pain. I directed the medicines which had been prescribed the fourth day to be repeated; the others to be omitted.

Thirteenth day. She vomited some blood along with the first dose of the bark. Pulse eighty, and stronger. The vesicles under the ear

ear and on the abdomen had difappeared. Several small veficles (not above the fize of a pea) arofe on the hypogaftic region of the abdomen, one on the labia pudendorum, and two on the left thigh. As ſhe had taken ſome bark, which remained on her ſtomach, I directed this medicine to be continued, and an anodyne draught to be adminiſtered at night.

Fourteenth day. She had two looſe ſtools, much intermixed with blood, and complained of great forenefs of her belly, increaſed by preſſure. I preſcribed a little caſtor oil : other medicines as before, except the draught.

Fifteenth day. She had had two ſtools ſome-what bloody the night before, and one almoſt natural in the morning. Pulse ſeventy-ſeven, and of pretty good ſtrength. Skin quite cool; ſpirits better; and ſome little appetite. Menſes had appeared in the morning. I directed the medicines to be continued as before.

From this time ſhe recovered apace, and in about a week had no complaint but weakneſs. Exerciſe, however, and the country air, ſoon completely re-eſtabliſhed her health.

After this full ſtatement of a caſe very diſtinctly marked, it would be ſuperfluous to add any thing by way of comment. I have only
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to observe, that whether this disorder be contagious or not is a question which may possibly still admit of some doubt; though, from what I have seen, or been able to collect, I am inclined to think that it is not. Almost all the instances of this disorder, which are precise and well attested, I have enumerated; and they are all solitary examples, no two of them having happened at the same time or place. I suspect, therefore, that some other disorders have been oftentimes mistaken for pemphigus; and that from thence, or from some pre-conceived theory, the notion has arisen. When I was assistant to Dr. Home, in the clinical ward of the Infirmary at Edinburgh, a patient was sent to us by Dr. Gregory, whose case he “supposed * to be a beginning “pemphigus,” and which he said “was plainly contagious.” In a note which he sent with this woman, he says, “I saw a boy five months “ago, in the same close, very ill of the same “disease; and I am told by the people that

* Though the disorder of this patient appeared eventually to be of a different nature, yet it must be remembered that the approaches of most diseases are ambiguous, and that this supposition by no means tends to impeach the judgement of a gentleman who is equally distinguished for his skill and veracity.

“several

“ several others, chiefly children, have had the
 “ same disease since in the same close.” This
 appeared extremely forcible, and accordingly
 had its due weight with the students : but in a
 day or two it appeared very evidently that the
 disease of the woman whom Dr. Gregory had
 sent us was merely topical. She had no fever.
 The vesicles (which were situated under the eye
 and upon the eyelid) were of a pale red colour;
 some pustules filled with yellow matter appeared
 upon the brow at the same time; and both of
 these vanished almost immediately after she came
 into the Infirmary; so that she left it in three or
 four days perfectly well, having taken no medi-
 cine but the saline julep. This woman denied
 to us that she had ever seen any one affected with
 vesicles; and, upon inquiring more particularly
 among different people in the same close, I found
 that they were in general very unqualified to
 give a distinct account of the epidemic disease
 (whatever it was) with which the children had
 been affected: they seemed, however, to think
 it neither novel nor alarming; and, by their
 description, I should rather take it to have been
 the chicken pox, or some such slight complaint,
 than the pemphigus. I can have no doubt that
 the boy Dr. Gregory mentioned he had seen was

really affected with pemphigus ; but I think that the vague testimony of the ignorant, indiscriminating people of the clofe is to be allowed no weight in deciding this nice question.

The nature of this diforder, as to its mildnefs or malignity, appears to vary confiderably. In fome instances it is extremely mild, as in three of the cafes I have feen ; one of them in this town with Dr. Fleury. In other instances life is in the greateft danger ; thus in feveral of the cafes I have enumerated ftrong fymptoms of putrefcency were manifested.

With refpect to the method of cure of this diforder, the general fymptoms of weaknefs and tendency to putrefaction obviously point out the proper treatment. When the veficles feize on the internal parts, irritation muft be guarded againft by opiates, demulcents, and gentle laxatives ; nourifhment muft be fupplied ; and the grand remedies, bark and wine, (efpecially the latter) muft be feduloufly adminiftered.