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BY

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CASE OF DERMATITIS HERPETIFORMIS OF THE PUSTULAR VARIETY.

BY LOUIS A. DUHRING, M.D.,

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IN reporting the notes of a case of a rare disease no apology therefor need be made, for the reason that any information on the subject must prove valuable. The disease under consideration being of infrequent occurrence, and, moreover, constituting a new field of observation, concerning which there seems to be some diversity of opinion among dermatologists, is for these and other reasons worthy of close investigation. With our present knowledge every case encountered is entitled to a place on record, with the hope that as the published data accumulate we shall better comprehend the process.

The following case was under my observation at intervals during a period of five years. At the time the disease seemed to me incomprehensible on account of the peculiar lesions, their behavior and course, which were altogether different from those of any affection with which I was familiar. Classification of the disease was beset with difficulties, as the original notes testify, and the case was regarded as an anomalous one—as representing, perhaps, an undescribed disease. The several provisional diagnoses (of eczema? of ecthyma? of tinea circinata?)

made from time to time show the resemblance of the lesions to those of well-known affections, and give an idea of the multiformity displayed. The case, moreover, is interesting as exhibiting a phase of this peculiar disease that has not been brought out in any of the cases that I have previously reported. These features will be referred to later.

The patient came under notice in 1874, and the following history is an abstract of the notes taken at that date. Daniel Welsh, fifty years of age, Irish, and a hostler by occupation. He had previously been subject to "prickly heat" during the summer about the trunk, and was so affected year before last, this attack having been followed by a much more serious disease of the skin similar to that, he states, with which he now suffers. He describes the eruption he had at that date as being pustular and vesicular, with intense itching and burning. The itching was intolerable, and the disease continued for three months. Crusting followed the formation of the pustules, which remained for some time, the process eventually passing off with scaling. He recovered in the autumn, and remained well six months, when the present eruption appeared. It continued throughout the summer, becoming better toward autumn, but it never left him entirely.

About a month ago it began to grow worse. It is now confined to the trunk, shoulders, and buttocks, and is particularly well defined upon the abdomen and sides of the thorax. The lesions are disseminated, but possess certain herpetic features, and consist of numerous minute, small and large pustules, with yellowish contents, in all stages of development. They vary much in size, some being no larger than pin-points and pin-heads, while others

have attained the size of peas and beans. The latter are not acuminate, but are flat and spread out, although considerably raised above the surrounding healthy skin. In outline the larger ones, as a rule, are oblong or irregular, and angular, and have an herpetic, "puckered" appearance. The small recent pustules are not attended with any redness of skin, having no inflamed base or areola; but the larger and older ones are surrounded with a deep red areola of considerable size. There are no vesicles. [A week's observation proved that this eruption began as a well-defined pustule, and continued as such until a crust formed, which became detached in four or five days, leaving a pigmented base.] In addition to the pustules there is considerable pigmentation, of a reddish, dirty-yellowish, brownish hue, which is present here and there over the surface in a marked degree, and is a conspicuous symptom, being much greater and more persistent than with other similar inflammatory processes.

The disease at present is almost without itching, burning, or other annoying symptoms. The eruption, he states, comes out in crops, one scarcely disappearing before another makes its appearance, and in this manner the process is kept up from week to week and month to month.

Such was the condition when admitted to the Dispensary for Skin Diseases, April 28, 1874. He was placed upon external and internal treatment, the disease being then regarded as pustular eczema. During the following month under the use of iron and arsenic and varied external remedies the cutaneous lesions increased. A few weeks later minute pustules began to appear in a grouped, circinate, herpetic form, as in typical *tinea circinata*, the appearances resembling an exaggerated phase of this

latter disease, so much so that it was thought it might possibly be due to a vegetable parasite, but the microscopic examination revealed nothing of this nature.

Itching and heat now began greatly to annoy the patient, and within a week some of the circinate patches increased in size until they became two inches in diameter. The pustules were minute and small, and hence the picture did not suggest herpes iris. Two weeks later the attack subsided and the lesions rapidly disappeared, but only to reappear immediately as a new crop, as before, in the form of numerous pin-point and pin-head sized pustules. The following week another crop, numbering thousands of lesions, invaded the trunk, accompanied with burning but no itching. This attack increased in extent and severity, but the lesions remained small, a few only being as large as a pea. Scales and thin crusts formed in large patches, and scaling and exfoliation set in. The skin became intensely itchy and hot, and he was unable to sleep, and was depressed and discouraged.

The patient now passed from under observation, having experienced no relief from the varied treatment which he had undergone. Five years afterward he again presented himself to me, still a sufferer with the same disease. An ointment containing sublimed sulphur one ounce, lard two ounces, and oil of walnuts two drachms, was now used, and with positive relief to the itching and burning, and with the remarkable result of causing the lesions rapidly to disappear. The inunctions were made with friction, as in the treatment of scabies. I subsequently saw him in several attacks, in one of which the pustules were herpetic and grouped, as previously, in a crescentic or more or less annular form, new lesions,

moreover, showing themselves on the periphery of the patches, accompanied with much itching. The ointment referred to was again (and on later occasions) employed with the same admirable result, the patient stating that during the many years of his suffering this was the first and only remedy that had in any degree benefited him. He spoke of the relief to the subjective symptoms as being instantaneous, and looked forward to a speedy permanent cure. Whether or not this occurred I am unable to say, as shortly afterward he ceased attending the clinic.

The interesting points of the case are, first, that during the period I had the patient under observation the lesions remained pustular, being at times minute (not larger than pin-points and pin-heads), and on other occasions larger,—the size of peas and beans. At all times, even when the eruption might be regarded as being disseminated, they possessed herpetic features, being either (when of large size) seated upon an angry-looking, drawn-up, puckered base, or (when small) grouped in close proximity, sometimes in an annular form, as in *tinea circinata* and *herpes iris*. As characteristic of the disease, may be mentioned the disposition of the eruption to appear in crops; the pigmentation of the affected skin; the obstinacy of the process to treatment; the tendency to relapse; and the long duration of the disease as a whole. Finally, the subjective symptoms were peculiar, being at one time marked and at another time almost absent. The variations on this point were remarkable if the statements of the patient are to be relied on. The fact, however, of the lesions being pustular would account for the comparative freedom from itching, this symptom, as is well known, rarely accompanying pustular lesions of any kind.

