

Stout (F. J.)

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INSTRUCTOR IN DERMATOLOGY IN THE PHILADELPHIA POLYCLINIC.



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THIS term (derived from *λευκός*, white, and *πάθος*, disease) has been given to that condition in which white spots appear upon the nails. A very striking example of this peculiarity was exhibited in the case of A. C., a mulatto, who presented himself in July, 1893, at Dr. Van Harlingen's clinic at the Philadelphia Polyclinic for treatment. The patient is a waiter by occupation, and twenty-one years of age; he has scrofulous glands on the left side of his neck, and is suffering with gastritis; his mother died of tuberculosis; his father is still living. He had always enjoyed good health until last April, when he had an attack of influenza. He is an individual of medium size, and fairly intelligent; at present he is somewhat nervous and weak. The nails of his fingers, and some of those of the toes, present quite a peculiar appearance, being marked with wavy white lines and white spots of a milky color. It will be necessary to describe the appearance of the nails on the individual fingers and toes separately, as they differ somewhat. The nails of the index, middle, and ring fingers of the right hand (see illustration) are marked with a wavy, transverse, white line or lines, more or less perfect, extending from one margin of the nail to the other; between the lines on the index and middle fingers there exist interspaces, which are normal in color and each about one-sixteenth of an



inch in width ; the nails of the thumb and little finger are marked each with three separate white spots. On the left hand a similar condition is also observed to exist ; each of the nails of the middle and ring finger of this hand exhibits a transverse white band, more or less irregular in contour, extending from one margin of the nail to the other ; the narrow strip of intervening normal color between the bands, referred to as existing on the index



and middle fingers of the right hand, is, however, lacking on these finger-nails. The band on the middle finger occupies about one-half of the length of the nail ; the nail of the thumb is marked with a distinct large white spot on its margin ; the nail of the little finger presents a white spot on its surface near the center, and is white along its margin. The nail on the index finger has three transverse bands, which do not extend entirely

across the nail-surface, and between these there exists an interspace of about one-eighth inch, which is normal in color. The rest of the nail-substance of all of the fingers appears normal in every respect, and presents a healthy and glossy appearance.

Some of the nails on the toes are similarly marked.



On the nails of the right foot white bands are visible, which extend partially across the nail-surface, and also exist at the margin of the nails of the great toe, the second, third, fourth, and fifth toes. On the left foot the margins of the nail of the great and second toes are marked respectively with a similar white line. With this exception, the nails of the toes of both feet do not show any abnormality whatever, and are perfectly healthy in other

respects. The hair of the individual does not show any discoloration, but is quite black in color.

According to the patient's statement, these lines and white spots have been present ever since he can remember, and have never disappeared at any time, and no other member of his family on either side has been similarly affected; it would appear from the history of the case that the condition is probably congenital.

The appearances presented by the finger-nails in this man are similar to those existing in a case described by Morison, of Baltimore,¹ occurring in a young lady, twenty years of age, which made their appearance without ascertainable cause, and disappeared after a few months; the nails of the toes, however, were not affected, differing, therefore, in these respects from the case under consideration. Dr. Morris Longstreth, of Philadelphia, in a paper entitled "On Changes in the Nails in Fever, and Especially in Relapsing Fever," describes the appearance of white bands on his own finger-nails after an attack of relapsing fever, which occurred at the time of each relapse of the fever. Crocker (*Diseases of the Skin*) quotes a case recorded by Bielschowsky² of a man with peripheral neuritis, in which white spots appeared at the lower part of the finger-nails, rapidly grew, and in three weeks coalesced into a band extending across each nail, a millimeter wide. The toes were not affected. Cases are also on record by Giovannini and Unna³ (quoted by Crocker) in which the nails on the hands of male individuals were completely white. In Giovannini's case the affection followed an attack of typhoid fever in an individual twelve years old; the hair retained its original color. In Unna's case the condition was probably con-

¹ "Leucopathia Unguium," THE MEDICAL NEWS, 1887, vol. li, p. 430.

² British Medical Journal, Supplement, January 17, 1891.

³ Giovannini, "Canities Unguium;" Unna, "Leuconychia and Leucotrichia," Internat. Atlas, plate xix.

genital, and the hair presented a partial appearance of the condition known as ringed hair. Dr. Langdon Down¹ records the presence on the fingers and toes of a gentleman, of two distinct sets of white lines extending transversely over the nails, which made their appearance after he had experienced two attacks of poor health from severe overwork; in this case marked prostration, intermittent action of the heart, and ulceration of one cornea existed; the lines on the nails corresponded with the time of the occurrence of the two attacks. Dr. Herman Lawrence describes² a case of leukopathia unguium, characterized by the presence of white bands, in an apparently healthy middle-aged man, which he regards as congenital. The nails on the fingers of this patient's child, a boy five years old, presented a similar appearance, though not so distinctly marked. Dr. Lawrence expressed the opinion that the nails of the child would, in the course of time, show the identical banded condition existing in the father's case.

Careful microscopic examination of nail-substance marked as in the case here described, shows the white bands to consist of air-spaces in the nail-substance, similar to those found in gray hairs; we are, however, unacquainted with their mode of origin. White spots, which occur occasionally on entirely healthy nails, point to passing changes in the site of formation of the nails (Hyrtl). Among convalescents from malignant fevers the nails have been noticed to become white. Whiteness of the nails of a chalky hue has been observed in paralytic patients. Sometimes the appearance is evidently partially dependent on trophic changes, as in the cases of Longstreth and Down. According to Hutchinson, white spots may be due to picking back of the nail-

¹ Transactions of the Pathological Society, 1870, vol. xxi, p. 409.

² The Australian Medical Journal, October 15, 1893.

fold, and frequently coëxist with similar white spots on the teeth. Geber is of the opinion that they are produced by mechanical means that interfere with the complete cornification of the nail-cells. To these white spots on the nails the ancients gave the name of flores unguium, and in Fallopius' time they were called mendacia ("lies"), and are still vulgarly known as "flowers," or "lies," and as "gift-spots." I am indebted to Dr. E. L. Billstein for the accompanying illustration.

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