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ON THE OCCURRENCE OF AN UNUSUAL FORM  
OF PRURITUS DURING PREGNANCY.

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WOMEN frequently suffer, towards the end of pregnancy, from the annoyance of local pruritus affecting the perineal region; but I am not aware that such a complication as that of a general pruritus, involving the whole cutaneous surface and the mucous surfaces of the upper outlets of the body, has been noticed, at least with any degree of special interest. For this reason, I have thought it worth the while to give the details of a case that came under my observation, with particular reference to the treatment which eventually proved successful as a palliative measure.

The patient, a lady aged 34, the mother of six children, of nervous temperament and fair health, was in the seventh month of utero-gestation, when I attended her for gastric disorder, indicated by heartburn and acidity. There was nothing in the nature of this attack to distinguish it from the ordinary dyspeptic symptoms common enough among puerperæ; and it apparently yielded to the action of bismuth and quinine. The gastralgia, however, was followed by a severe attack of facial neuralgia; and, as no relief attended the exhibition of strychnia, either alone in one-twenty-fourth grain doses three times a day, or combined with quinine, including the application of local sedatives, I judged it to be prudent to advise change of air. An excursion to the west coast of Scotland was fixed upon; and, within twenty-four hours after her arrival in Glasgow, the neuralgia, which had been most intense during the journey, ceased, and was superseded by the pruritus about which I now write, the invasion of which began with discomfort and restlessness during the night, owing to the itching of the skin. This was in the month of July last, and within eight weeks of her expected confinement.

On her return home, I found that the whole cutaneous surface was

affected with the most distressing itching, without any outward manifestation whatever; and the paroxysms, which ten days before had been chiefly at night, were now less intermittent, and present throughout the day. The incessant irritation and loss of sleep threatened to undo all the good effects of the change; the more so, that the pernicious mental reaction produced by the patient brooding over her misery, and dreading its results, probably aggravated the intensity of the pruritus in proportion to the amount of shock that the maternal instinct received; for I learned that, previously to her last confinement, three years ago, a similar train of neurotic phenomena had occurred, and, although of less duration and intensity, yet the pruritus had so prostrated both body and mind as to bring her to the verge of mania.

On July 30th, I prescribed fifteen grains of the bromide of potassium to be taken at bedtime, with the following lotion as a topical application, being one that I had frequently used with excellent results in pruritus of the perinæum: Borax, 200 grains; liquor morphine hydrochloratis ℥iiss; glycerine ℥j; water to eight ounces. The weather at this time was delightfully dry, warm, and exhilarating; so daily sponging every morning on rising, light clothing, quiet and frequent exercise in the open air, coolness and free ventilation of the bed-chamber, with a simple but nutritious dietary, were the several factors insisted upon as being likely to act beneficially.

On August 4th, the pruritus was as bad as ever. The remedies, giving no relief, were withdrawn; and, temporarily, elder-flower water, as a pleasant addition to the morning bath, was adopted; with glycerine for the varicose saphenous veins, in the neighbourhood of which the pruritus was especially intolerable; although I may remark that she had experienced the mere varicosity for the past ten years, which always disappeared after confinement.

On August 7th, I prescribed an emulsion of bitter almonds, with the addition of the dilute hydrocyanic acid of the *British Pharmacopœia*, to be sponged lightly over the parts most affected; and, with frequent applications during the day, and sometimes during the night, the pruritus became endurable. A week later, on August 16th, an attack of heartburn and loss of appetite supervened, complicating matters so as to render her miserable in the extreme. For this I gave her ten grains of the subnitrate of bismuth, four minims of the dilute hydrocyanic acid, with an ounce of infusion of chirayta, twenty minutes before meals, twice or thrice a day, with seeming benefit; but, unfortunately for any therapeutic credit, no sooner had the gastralgia gone than it was superseded by an attack of facial neuralgia, which lasted for ten days; and during this period the pruritus entirely vanished. Painful as the neuralgia was, the greater intermittency of its attacks afforded such intervals of comparative comfort, that my patient frequently expressed the hope that it might remain, rather than the pruritus should recur. The neuralgia, however, was in its turn superseded by the pruritus, which now involved the mucous surfaces of the mouth, throat, nose, and eyes; and this new feature proved so exquisitely distressing and completely preventing sleep, that I forthwith ordered hydrate of chloral in soporific doses at bedtime. On September 3rd, fifteen grains were given, increased next night to twenty, as the sedative action was insufficient. This quantity procured some sleep, from which my patient awoke refreshed, free from the pruritus, able to enjoy her breakfast, and pass a comfortable forenoon. Indeed, after the second night, she assured me that she had slept more soundly than she had done for three months past, as never a time elapsed without her being awake either by the pruritus or the effects of her involuntary scratching even to laceration of the skin. The use of the emulsion of prussic acid and bitter almonds was continued, to allay the attacks which occurred during the day. I tried unction of aconite, but was obliged to stop its use, as it gave rise to disagreeable tingling sensations, without in any way relieving the pruritus.

On September 10th, delivery with natural labour took place with great facility; and the chloral draughts, which had been given up to this time, were suspended on the following day.

In the first attack of pruritus, to which I incidentally alluded, this affection ceased by degrees, finally disappearing by the third day after confinement; but in the present instance this did not take place till ten days later, although during that time the severity and consequent distress were incomparable to the same symptoms before parturition. Up to the present time, my patient has enjoyed excellent health.

The whole case exhibits, I think, the proteiform aspects generally characteristic of neuroses; and a neurosis of the vagus appears to have been the starting-point. The occurrence at the outset of heartburn, one of the common troubles of pregnancy, and the apparent efficacy of the remedies employed for its relief, received another interpretation when an attack of facial neuralgia supervened immediately on its cessation; while the interchangeability, again, of this affection with pruritus indicated a certain correlation to exist among them—a view most in-

terestingly corroborated by a repetition of their first mode of manifestation.

The influence exerted by the gravid uterus can only be subordinate to an inherent predisposition to such neurotic affections; and, without any speculations as to what the nature of this predisposition may be, the interconnexion of the neuroses receives a probable explanation—firstly, in the relation existing between the nucleus of origin of the vagus, and the nucleus of origin of the sensory or ganglionic root of the fifth nerve, near the floor of the fourth ventricle; and, secondly, in the intimate and close connexion of their two nuclei with the grey matter of the cord continued in the medulla oblongata. For, inasmuch as the heartburn and itching of the throat depend upon the neurosis of the vagus, and the neuralgia and itching of the conjunctival, nasal, and buccal mucous surfaces are a neurosis of the fifth nerve, so the general cutaneous pruritus depends upon a neurotic affection of the nerves of common sensation.