

ART. X. *Remarks on a Cutaneous Affection, produced by certain Poisonous Vegetables.* By R. DAKIN, M. D. of Columbus, N. J.

SOME apology is, perhaps, necessary for offering the following remarks to the profession; but I do not recollect ever having seen a treatise upon the subject; and if authors on cutaneous affections have mentioned it, it is those to whose works others, perhaps like myself, have not had access. Judging, however, from the remedial means generally resorted to, and which, according to my observation, rarely facilitates the cure, I am forced to believe, that this disagreeable affection has not received a due share of attention, probably from its seldom occurring in cities, and coming within the observation of medical writers.

It is known among country people by the title of poison. The hands, feet, legs, face, and organs of generation, are the parts most usually affected. It is contracted by touching certain plants and shrubs, and not improbably, sometimes by inhaling, or swallowing with the saliva, the odour arising from them. Many suppose that breathing the smoke of the poisonous plants produces the disease.

The shrubs most virulent are the poison oak, (*Rhus toxicodendron*,) and the poison ivy. The poison oak, or sumach, grows in marshy lands, from three to seven or eight feet in height, with a smooth stem, the branches projecting almost horizontally from near the top. A milky juice exudes from a fresh cut or broken branch.

The ivy is a vine common I believe to most parts of the United States, growing luxuriantly in both low and high lands, running up stumps and trees, and attaching itself firmly to their bodies by innumerable fibrous roots. Many branches proceed from the body of the vine containing stems three or four inches in length, with three leaves of an oblong shape and glossy green appearance on each. I once saw a boy, who was doubtful respecting the poisonous properties of this vine, rub several leaves on the back of his forearm. The burning eruption in a day or two produced a painful conviction, which dispelled his doubts.

Some good meaning, mystical, marvellous physicians, or favoured ladies with knowledge inherent, say the bane will prove the best antidote, and hence advise the forbidden leaves to be eaten, both as a preventive and cure to the external disease. I have known the experiment tried, which resulted in an eruption, swelling, redness, and intolerable itching, around the verge of the anus. I was lately

applied to by a mower, who was very much alarmed at the condition of his anus, which was very much swollen: an examination immediately satisfied me that it was nothing but poison. I directed cooling laxatives for two or three days, gave him a box of ointment to counteract the inflammation, and I heard no more of the case.

After exposure, the eruption appears in from one to three days. The most prominent symptoms are, a slight itching and redness, followed by burning sensations, which soon become almost excruciating. The eruption, in most instances, is vesicular, about the size of a millet seed, and containing a transparent, thin, watery fluid, and so close together as to present a confluent mass. As the disease progresses, the contents of the vesicles become yellow, and finally, in severe cases, pus, of the consistence and colour of cream, is discharged, and the sores then soon heal. If rubbing or scratching be indulged in, which it is almost impossible to avoid, the eruption spreads wherever the cuticle is abraded. The fluid will sometimes ooze from the vesicles, and run to some distance, the course of which will be marked by a red streak, and all the symptoms common to the malady will follow. It is not dangerous, though very troublesome. If it be entrusted to poultices, lead water, cream, solution of galls, or mild soothing unguents, or lotions, or even to nature, it will generally terminate in from five to ten days.

The treatment which I have in every instance found successful, consists in blood-letting, cooling laxatives of neutral salts, and the following unguent as a local application:—R. Cupri sulph. ʒi.; Precip. mer. rub. ʒi.; Tereb. ven. ʒiij.; Axung. porc. ʒi.—M. ft. ungt.

On the slightest admonition that the disease is contracted, I abrade the cuticle, or open the pimples, and apply a small quantity of the ointment, which occasions a slight smarting, but agreeable, compared with the tormenting sensations attendant on the affection. One or two applications with about twelve hours intervening between them, will arrest the inflammation, and in three or four days all marks of disease is generally obliterated. Venesection is rarely necessary, except the eyes, scrotum, or some important organ be concerned. The above ointment is most efficient in arresting the progress of the complaint if applied the day of its appearance; and though neglected for two, three, or four days, will generally give prompt relief.

The affected parts should be kept cool, and the patient be ordered not to handle his body, without first washing his hands, after touching the sores, as he might thus unconsciously inoculate other parts.

Why some possess a constitutional immunity from this disease, is a question that I believe has not been satisfactorily solved. Children

are susceptible whose parents never were poisoned. Many rub themselves with the baneful leaves without the slightest injury. Mulattoes and negroes, light and dark complexions, appear equally susceptible. This susceptibility recedes as age advances. By simple contact with the vine or bush, we do not always contract the disease; but boys subject to it, who run through meadows, get their feet scratched, and then touch the vine, generally pay dearly for their temerity.

I should be pleased to have the question solved, why some handle with impunity what will so soon severely punish others. Can it be possible, that some peculiar structure of the cuticle, or rete mucosum, constitutes this idiosyncrasy? I have sometimes thought that children, in the maximum of animal life, were more obnoxious to the poison than those of lower rank in the vital scale. I do not recollect of ever having seen a pale looking person poisoned, at the same time, however, many vigorous habits are not susceptible.

I have just learned that Dr. HOBSON of New York, some time since, published a small work on this subject, and that it is his opinion, that the disease is seated in the rete mucosum. With this view I coincide, for were the skin the seat, and the mucous surfaces only different, by being so alive to impressions, so quick in their organic perceptibility, the great extent of their sympathies, &c. we should often have it in the form of pneumonic, gastric, or enteritic inflammation. I have seen the eruption spread to the corners of the mouth, but no farther, not even within the verge of the epithelium.

ART. XI. *On Hydrorachitis, with Cases.* By SOLOMON TEMPLE,
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HYDRORACHITIS, though not a very common disease, is of sufficient importance to claim attention. It is a dropsy within the spinal canal, and is usually congenital; commencing, in all probability, in the first months of uterine life. At birth it is characterized, in most instances, by a livid spot seated upon some portion of the spinal column, and most frequently in the lumbar region or on the sacrum. This spot very soon becomes elevated, and conveys to the touch an evident sense of fluctuation. The tumour either ruptures at this period and discharges a fluid, usually transparent and resembling serum, but sometimes thick, flocculent, and turbid; or it increases gradually and sometimes attains an enormous bulk. On some occasions the tu-