wound was granulating in the most healthy manner, the child died suddenly of convulsions. On inquiry, I found that the mother had been thrown into a violent fit of passion late at night, and that she suckled her infant soon afterwards, immediately subsequent to which the fatal convulsion succeeded. In another instance I was sent for in great haste to see an infant in a convulsive fit, and on inquiry found that the nurse who was employed to suckle her infant had been guilty of some misconduct, for which she had been severely reprimanded. Soon after this mental agitation the infant was suckled by her, and that occurrence was followed by the convulsive attack referred to. The late Sir Richard Croft, who had the immediate care of this child, informed me, that he had frequently known similar cases, and that all the mischief was to be attributed to the pernicious effects which moral excitement produces on the *milk* of the nurse, an effect with which, in some degree, every one is familiar. Mr. North in his treatise on the "Convulsions of Infants," makes allusion to this circumstance, and has mentioned examples of it.

Ever since the occurrence of the cases now mentioned, I have considered it of great importance to arrange, previous to an operation on an infant, how the nursing was afterwards to be conducted, and have taken care that neither the mother nor the hired nurse should be agitated by the screams of the child, or that if they be at all alarmed by them, the child shall not be allowed to suckle until all effects of such agitation have ceased.

Operations on the youth or adult are more dangerous than on the infant or on aged people, and the risk arises from the greater chance of consecutive inflammation. In them, therefore, it is particularly necessary to go through a system of preparation, and not to have an operation performed hastily, if necessity do not demand one, but to wait until a favourable period arrives.

With regard to old people, it is a mistaken opinion, that a person is too old to submit to an operation. The operation for cataract, cancer of the lip, and similar affections, I would much prefer performing at the most advanced periods of life, and my reason is, that these operations create in old people much less inflammation, while to secure their success it is essentially requisite that little inflammation should follow, and that the wounds be cured by adhesions.

I shall next consider the treatment to be employed previous to performing operations.

NOTE ON THE
RETE MUCOSUM
OF THE SKIN; WITH A THEORY OF
ALBINISM.

By THOMAS WHARTON JONES, Esq., Surgeon, Edinburgh.

THE *rete mucosum* is that part of the skin which is the seat of colour. In the skin of the negro, in which its structure is most easily studied, it may be distinctly observed to be composed of a brown substance interposed between two layers of a white colour, called, by Gaultier, the internal and external albugineous tunics.

When examined by the aid of a microscope, it presents a reticular appearance, which, however, exists only in its inner surface, and is merely the result of the impression of the papillæ of the dermis. This is well illustrated by the skin of the cetaceous animals, in which the *rete mucosum* is very thick, and is reticulated on the inner surface only, by a series of deep depressions which receive the very large papillæ of the dermes. The reticular appearance being therefore not essential to its organization, the name *rete mucosum* might be well superseded by that of the *pigmentous layer of the skin*. The *rete mucosum* is the seat of colour. In the negro it contains a great quantity of colouring matter; it has less in the white person, and none at all in the albino.

I have shown in a paper, published in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal* for July, 1833, that the *pigmentum nigrum* of the eye is deposited in a membrane of a peculiar structure, the development of which is in a direct ratio to the quantity of colouring matter it contains. I have also shown that in the albino animal, in which there is no colouring matter, that the membrane is at its *minimum* of development. So it is with regard to the *rete mucosum* of the skin; it is highly developed in persons of colour, less so in white persons, and at its *minimum* in the albino.

By recent researches, the different parts of animal bodies have been proved to pass through certain degrees of development before arriving at complete maturity; it has also been shown, that many of the congenital malformations observed in animals are owing to an arrestment of their development. So it is with ALBINISM, which I conceive to be dependent on an arrestment in the development of the *pigmentous membranous system* of the body, by which it is rendered incapable of secreting colouring matter.

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