

HEALTH AND DISEASE

AT

BORNEO PROPER.

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THE following remarks were made by the writer during a short stay at Bruni, or Borneo Proper, in the spring of 1836, in the month of May, which is reckoned by the people the most unhealthy period of the year. About this time the monsoon changes, the wind that has blown for several months from the N.E. now shifts to an opposite quarter, the S.W.; rain, sudden gusts of wind, and phenomena of a meteoric kind, with great dampness, follow this change. A continual deposition of moisture from the atmosphere, which, according to the beautiful theorem of Hutton, is always the result of a change of wind from a warm to a cold, and from a cold to a warm quarter; and the sudden vicissitudes of temperature which take place at the same time, may be regarded as the leading causes of those maladies, and many lighter forms of indisposition, that happen in this month at Borneo.

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It was a very common thing to hear patients complain of dimness of sight and a troublesome secretion from the eye. This was, in a great majority of cases, connected with the existence of the pterygium, or unguis, as it is called by Celsus. The web of blood-vessels extended from either, and more frequently from both, corners of the eye, reached over the cornea, and hindered vision, while the patients complained that they could not see distant objects, and sometimes that things nearer the eye could not be clearly discerned. Hence I inferred that the formation of this membranous web is connected with some disorder in the other parts of the eye. It is, perhaps, improper to speak of this as a distinct membrane, for in all these instances it seemed to be a preternatural development of the conjunctiva, occasioned by the over-action of the blood-vessels that meander through it. This, as it appears in the shape of a loose veil, soft and moveable, is better denominated by the French name *drapeau*.

These I treated with calomel, thoroughly spread by means of a small silver spatula. They yielded after four or five such applications, and the sufferer spoke in the most glowing terms of his recovery. The calomel was mixed with no caustic substance, and seems to have effected its work by emptying the vessels. The general health of the individual was improved by appro-

priate means, at the same time, for this affection seldom occurs without other signs of disorder and bad habit. One cannot help reflecting upon the virtues of cleanliness, as it is a very rare thing to see an ugly disease without being obliged to note a dirty skin, covered with neglected and sordid clothing. I am inclined to think that the tendency to vascularity in the conjunctiva is occasioned by the habit of exposing the head in the middle of the day, unprotected by either hair or turban. Very few eyes that I examined were exempt from a preternatural thickening of this membrane, though in many instances it did not project far enough over the cornea to create any inconvenience. In no other place visited by us did I find the natives afflicted in this way, and in no other place do men forget to screen their heads by a loose flowing capillamentum, if not by a turban also; I think, therefore, if we place these two circumstances in the order of cause and effect, we shall not be very wide of the truth.

Many complained of pains in their bowels, "*Tujan prutnia mulas*." This was often linked with a pain in the forehead, just above the space between the eyebrows. A disordered stomach occasioned the pain in the head, and quickened the pulse, while flatulency generated the colicky pains so often painted to us with great pathos and descriptive action. A gentle purgative was at all times sufficient to remove all the unpleasant symptoms.

Many appeals were made for help by those who alleged that they were suffering from pains in the back and loins. An *ubat ping gang* and *ubat pong gong*, a medicine for the loins and the lower part of the back, were the never-ceasing themes of application, not among those who really endured aches and debility only, but also among those who were the strongest and most healthy, as they hoped that the production of amatory virtues would be one of its effects. These pains result from excessive venery, as it constitutes the chief amusement of the Pangirans, who dedicate all their leisure to sensual pleasure, and wanton their moments amidst the seductive blandishments of female softness. A score or two of women, upon an average, expect the duty of marriage from a single individual, who, enticed by the witchery of a numerous assortment, and the wily arts of a pleasing address, "*baniah chumbania*," does more than his best to gratify the whole; and thus is the subject of pain, feebleness, and disappointment, and solicits medical aid with as much feeling and earnestness as he would were he suffering from the stone or the gravel. Another consequence of this is a temporary suspension of seminal secretion, so that a medicine to restore it was sometimes applied for, where no mention was made of pains or aches. A preparation

of this kind would fetch its weight in gold at Borneo, though that precious metal comes hither only in presents from other parts of the island.

A white glairy fluid is often the accompaniment of pains in the back. One unacquainted with their habits would suppose that the patient was afflicted with gonorrhœa; but this is impossible, as they do not stray beyond their harems, and the inmates are too closely watched to make it easy for them to bring home such a disease by transgressing; besides, it is essentially different in its characters; there is no external inflammation nor chordee, but a smarting along the urethra, and a stricture, so that the urine is passed only by little and little, *sedikit sedikit*; the discharge takes place after making water, and resembles the white of an egg. Whether this disease be a modification of the *nimia profusio seminis* described by Celsus, I know not, as he mentions no concurrent symptoms, and, after a little of the old woman's counsel, winds up by saying *vitare et ne supinus abdoimat*.

Impetigo, Kuris of Bruni, Pu of the Sandwich islanders.—The varieties of this disease are very common upon the legs and feet, and not unfrequently upon the hands, and the other parts of the body. The Sultan himself has a constant succession of the lesser kind of pustules upon his feet, which afford him a perpetual source of kingly occupation, in removing the scales of old sores, and letting out the lymph from the new ones. A small blister, or bullula, springs up at first, which breaks, discharges its contents, and leaves behind a bare deep-red spot, with scaly edges. This often spreads till an ugly wound is made, while the surrounding part, in several instances, becomes swollen and painful. The process of the disease seems to be this,—lymph is collected under the epidermis from the diseased or over-active state of the vessels; below, the operation is continued in a diverging course all round, while the epidermis is disengaged and left free, in the form of a thick, yellowish, smooth, and flattened scale, surrounded by a red halo. Without a microscopic view of the textures macerated in water one cannot tell precisely in what state the subjacent parts are; but they seem to have the cellular tissue gorged and broken up, so that blood and sanies often flow out in the more serious cases. In some instances the pustule grows to a very large size before the superincumbent scab is broken, and is then very painful, with a large deep-red areola around the ci-tern of pus in the centre; it is then solitary; the smaller seem to be gathered into one large one. The worst instances I have seen are on the ankle-joint, which is then much swollen, assumes a dark livid appearance, pined with white, and is cut up by wounds of various sizes. The joint becomes inca-

pable of movement, the foot shrinks, and so does the rest of the limb above the wound. Celsus says that it is incurable; and when we take into consideration the health of the individual, and the mangled state of all the integuments, one may easily credit his assertion.

In the case of a man afflicted in this way I proposed amputation; he intimated his willingness to have the whole of the diseased portion cut off by paring, but said it was not a custom here to lose the bone with the flesh. In milder cases flowers of sulphur, sprinkled dry upon the bare sore, seemed to have a good effect; it is sufficiently corrosive to remove superfluities, and helps as a discutient to discharge the collected juices. In the larger kinds, which continue suppurating a long time before they break, my practice was to take off the scab with the scalpel, dry the wound with a dossil of lint, and then apply another, dipped in flowers of sulphur. This being confined by strips of adhesive plaster served to keep out extraneous substances, which, from habitual neglect, often enter, and keep up irritation till a frightful wound is produced. If fresh lint was applied in this way every day the healing would be accelerated; rest is necessary, for a day's exercise and exposure will undo all the good that has been done for several days previous to it.

Puru, pustulæ.—A pustular disease, which affects children after a certain age. The face, breast, and back are set over with flat-crowned risings, which have thick, puckered margins, and are full of pus. They arise in clusters, and are of various sizes. When the dried cuticle is broken, a bloody hollow remains below, surrounded by a margin rough and elevated. These pustules come under the definition of phlyctæna, since they are characterised by the depressed nature of the summit, and the red angry sore that is seen on its removal. The child of the Sultan's brother was shown to me; the body was sprinkled over with these pustules, but the largest crop was seated upon the back and loins, which presented, from the aggravation of the sores, a frightful sight of raw and broken flesh; its appearance was pale and sickly, so that the disease is connected with the general state of the health.

A variety, or perhaps a distinct species, attacks the face, where it travels from place to place, till the whole, or a greater part, has been traversed, leaving behind it a discoloured and pitted scar, full of puckers, which, it is said, remains for two or three years, owing to the exulceration of the skin during the process of the disease. I saw an example of it, where the tip and wings of the nose had been destroyed, one of the passages shut up, and the other one just perforated. Sometimes it is aggregate, as in the instance just mentioned, and in others spo-

radic, so that the face looks as if it had been pitted by the small-pox. This disorder is not contagious, and confines its operations to children. It seems not to be attended with any kind of illness or fever, nor otherwise serious, save in the sad disfigurement which it produces in the most sightly parts of the body. No alarm is excited by its appearance, but it is looked upon as a common disorder incident to young people.

Two sores of a similar kind I saw one morning in a boy, one upon the forehead and the other below the nether lip; they were large raised pustules, with a great crown, and a rough puckered margin; he was one of the dirtiest fellows I had seen. The constant puddling in salt water, without a subsequent bathing in fresh streams, will not keep the person clean. A plaster, composed of sordes and animal transpiration, will resist all such puny attacks as these to remove it. At Zamboanga the muscular tori had a finished roundness, and the complexion was the hue of health and comfort; at Borneo it is rare to see anything that approximates to it; on all, with very few exceptions, we discover a dirty grain, sores, or the scars that they left behind them, or something upon the surface that bespeaks an unwholesome state of things.

At Zamboanga all the inhabitants wash their persons and their clothes in a stream of water that flows fresh from the mountains. At Borneo they often plunge into salt water, scrub away for a short space, dive, laugh, and talk, and then come forth neither to wash in sweet water, nor to wipe off the salt, but to bask awhile in the sun, till evaporation and the crystallising process have formed a briny deposit, to mix and assimilate with the dirt of the skin. It is easy to conceive that a constant irritation must be kept up, which, when added to the exposure of which they are so fond, is sufficient to induce these ugly and painful deformities. A Malay is proud of his bare foot, which is, if we judge from a Caucasian standard, of a middling size, with a high instep, and toes well proportioned, and standing apart in a radiating manner, like the furls in a lady's fan. But this much-prized item of beauty is never exempt from either scars, running sores, or old scabs,—so unfortunate is this attempt at personal display.

The females are less infested with these scabs, as they wear more clothing and keep their persons cleaner, but the feet of the elder ones are often pied with vitiligo, and by their white and brown marbling, look like a cow's teat, when moistened. These discolourations are more disgusting than the sores, and, in all probability, far more difficult to cure.

Kurap.—A curious exfoliation and cracking of the epidermis, so that the body appears as if covered with scales. These are easily removed, but the fresh cuticle that is

formed beneath will, in like manner, break, and roll up as soon as the former is taken off. This defect seems to arise from a peculiar thinness of the outer investment of the body, and to its apparent tightness, so that, as if unable to resist the habitual tension exerted upon it, it splits, and peels off in rings and configurations of various curvature. The most robust constitution seems to be most liable to this disease, so that a well-built good-looking female is often, upon a near approach, found to be ruffled in this unsightly manner. It comes on in childhood, and lasts till old age.

Kurap bulan, so called because it breaks out towards the full of the moon. It is a cluster of sores, or pustules, where the epidermis and a part of the skin being destroyed, the subjacent parts are left bare. About the time of new moon it disappears; at full it returns again. This account was true in the present instance, as the moon was very near her superior conjunction.

ON THE

ADVANTAGES OF A SPECULUM CUSHION.

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ONE of the most important modern improvements in the art of healing, in this country, is the departure from the conjectural mode of treating obstinate diseases of the uterus, and the adoption of physical examination by the speculum, so as to bring the various changes which occur in that organ within the scope of ocular examination, and enable them to be studied with as much accuracy as the ophthalmic surgeon displays in the investigation of his peculiar cases. The advantages of the speculum uteri arise from the same indisputable principle which has ever been acted on in the practice of ophthalmic and general surgery. By its employment cases which had been previously mistaken or overlooked,—sufficient in number and importance to silence the abettors of the conjectural system of treatment,—are daily becoming revealed in their true character.

On the introduction of a comparatively new instrument into the *private practice* of medical men it might have been naturally expected that there would be a variety of opinions relative to the form of the instrument, and that each practitioner would extol that with which he was most conversant, without considering the respective merits of each, or what desideratum still remained to be accomplished by the inventive faculty in either one or the other of them. Hence Ricord's two-bladed speculum is the *only one* adopted by some; but this instrument is made but of *one size* for