

of the tumour might pass, and which was worn by a little girl, until, from the increased projection and from pressure, not only were the pain and tenderness much increased, but paralysis of the lower extremities was eventually induced. And all this to avoid the simple, easy, and harmless process of laying the patient for a few months in a recumbent posture. On the evils attendant upon the various mechanical inventions, and upon the false principles on which they are constructed, I cannot now descant; it will be sufficient here to observe, that the purpose they seek to effect is temporary, but that the evils to which they give rise are permanent, while the very assistance they afford, by superseding and destroying the power of the muscles, renders it difficult ever to discontinue their use. I have this moment been consulted by a young lady, who has worn steel supports for the last five years, with a still-increasing and now enormous curvature of the spine, and who, if she leaves them off for a moment, feels quite incapable of supporting herself in the erect position.

But the profession on this subject has been woefully inert. Its conduct has been also feeble, indecisive, unreflecting, too frequently uninformed; and where empiricism perceives so many weak points it will be sure to make its attacks. The early stage of spinal disease may be said to test, not merely the skill, but the courage as well, and the firmness, of the medical attendant. "There is nothing to be seen, and little, as yet, to be felt," says the fond mother; "may he not sit up to his meals?—may he not go out for a little fresh air?" And she will argue, perhaps, that more harm may be done, by restricting him from air and exercise, than good, by persevering in the position in which you propose to place him. But there must be no compromise. There may be nothing to be seen, but there is enough to be felt, to convince you that there is spinal disease; and, aware of the almost certain cure to result from perfect rest in a proper position, and of the almost certain ruin, that attends upon its neglect, or upon its partial adoption, he who has had the courage in so apparently slight a case to propose so important a remedy, must have firmness enough to resist all attempts to supersede its adoption, or to render its use unavailing. Nor is it enough that he prescribe, or even enforce, the use of this proper position; he must himself watch, and control, and modify it, according to circumstances, or he will find it to be inadequately and inefficiently employed. And this is the error arising from mere consultation—the error of those who fancy they can purchase an opinion for a guinea, and cheaply themselves carry into effect the directions of the physician or the surgeon. I am, perhaps, dwelling too long upon this subject, but I

cannot fail to be impressed with its extr importance, when, within this fortnight have seen a young lady suffering under ease and incipient posterior curvature, v has been desired by her physician to lie much as possible; and a little girl, now the subject of immense distortion, with paralysis, whose parents had been told by a most eminent surgeon to keep her in bed as much as they could; and the wife of a tradesman, with incipient disease and distortion, whose medical attendant told her that he "must put in a pea or two on each side of her spine," but who had not been forbidden to stand half the day behind the counter, nor to carry about, during the other half, a great boy, nearly nine months old. A pea or two on each side of the spine may be very good things, for aught I know, though I am not quite sure of it; but how could they be expected to arrest the progress of disease in a patient who was allowed to follow such injurious avocations?

To conclude this part of my subject, and with it this letter, I shall only add, that if I can but promote the universal adoption of a proper recumbent position in this early stage of diseased spine, I shall have helped to rescue from suffering and deformity thousands yet unborn; and a professional life, now verging towards its close, will not have been passed in vain. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

CHARLES VERRALL.

Lowther Arcade, Feb. 2, 1840.

ON DISEASES OF THE SKIN.

By WM. ERASMUS WILSON, Esq., Consulting
Surgeon to the St. Pancras Infirmary.

LICHEN.

DURING the temporary burst of warm spring weather with which this month commenced, I was led to observe the remarkable prevalence of lichen, under its various forms. In the young and plethoric it assumed the character of lichen acutus, in the aged it appeared as lichen chronicus, and in one of my patients, a lady of weakly constitution, it put on the more unusual aspect of lichen circumscriptus. So long as the mild weather existed, the disease was, in many cases, obstinate, and resisted the ordinary methods of treatment, while the sudden return of a colder temperature has, in itself, operated a cure in several instances.

If it be true, that certain cutaneous diseases are dependant for their evolution upon the state of the nervous system, it is especially so with regard to the commoner forms of lichen. We, therefore, in certain instances, see this and other affections at those periods when the atmospheric condi-

tions are such as to call into operation a more active exercise of the functions dependant on that system, particularly the organs of digestion and of secretion, especially in the skin. During the winter months the cutaneous system has been comparatively torpid; a smaller proportion of the vital fluid has been directed towards the external surface; the secretion of an extensive apparatus of glandular organs has been at rest, while an increased vascular supply has been determined to the internal mucous surfaces.

But so soon as the atmospheric warmth is felt by the general system, the skin again resumes its more energetic powers, and the equilibrium between these two important and extensive surfaces is temporarily disturbed. In many instances this disturbance is so slight as scarcely to be appreciable in its transition; but in other cases, particularly where a dermic diathesis exists, its effects are rendered apparent by the development of various forms of cutaneous disease. It was the observation of this fact by the older physicians that induced them to prescribe cooling and prophylactic remedies in the spring of the year, and that same principle, popularised by vulgar tradition, has perpetuated the employment of blood-letting and aperient medicines at the "spring and fall of the leaf."

The use of the bath is a measure of the utmost importance to the preservation of health, one of easy attainment by all classes of society, but one which the perversity of human nature leads us to despise, from its very facility of acquisition. In large cities, where habitations are crowded together, streets are ill ventilated, and the atmosphere is impregnated with soot, dust, and animal exhalations, the bath is absolutely necessary to health, and if more frequently employed would certainly preserve its votaries from many painful and distressing diseases. To the affluent the bath-room is the abode of luxury, but the humblest may attain every necessary object by sponging the skin over every part of its surface with common water, and once in the seven days with a weak solution of subcarbonate of soda. By such simple means the sentient nerves would be healthfully stimulated, the capillary system of the skin excited to perform its natural offices, and disease, particularly of the cutaneous kind, effectually averted.

As an instance of the value of the bath, as a therapeutic agent, I may cite the case of a young man admitted on the 6th of this month into the St. Pancras Infirmary, affected with lichen pilaris over the greater part of his body, accompanied with incessant pruritus, with extensive eczema impetiginodes on both forearms, and impetigo upon the side of one cheek. He was ordered to remain in the tepid bath for an hour every other day, without other treatment than a

moderate diet, and was discharged on the 20th of March perfectly cured.

In the minds of the patient, and of the inexperienced, lichen is calculated to excite great apprehension, from the suspicion of its being a disease very justly looked upon with a feeling of horror and disgust, from being generally the companion of filth and uncleanness. It is, therefore, of much importance to be fully conversant with all the characters which tend to the formation of a correct diagnosis, and to act accordingly. Lichen, from being subject to atmospheric changes, may attack several members of the same family at the same time, without possessing the slightest tendency to be contagious.

LICHEN ACUTUS.—A lady, pregnant with her second child, consulted me for incessant and distressing itching over the back and shoulders, on the loins, and on the outer sides of the arms and legs. On examining those parts I found a number of minute red papulæ, of a pale colour, but becoming brightly red on friction. The papulæ composing this eruption were mostly discreet, but in some situations were collected into groups, and formed patches of variable size, some of which were covered with a thin furfuraceous desquamation. Her pulse was full, and somewhat quickened by the excitement of the disease, the tongue was white and moist, and the digestive system evidently disordered. I bled her to ten ounces, and prescribed a course of gentle aperient medicines. For the local affection I ordered a tepid bath twice in the week, and lotions, composed of one drachm of pyroligneous acid to a pint of rose-water, to be sponged over the surface night and morning, and whenever, during the night, the pruritus and tingling became insupportable. This treatment was most successful, and at the end of three weeks every trace of the affection had disappeared.

LICHEN CHRONICUS.—Two children, the one nine and the other twelve years of age, were the subjects of this disease. The affection was seated on the back of the neck and shoulders, on the front of the chest and epigastrium, on the forearms and legs, but scarcely at all on the upper arms and thighs. The surface was very slightly reddened, but felt uneven and pimply to the touch. The pruritus was increased after meals, but during the night was perfectly insupportable. By means of purgative medicines freely administered, frequent ablutions in lukewarm water, low diet, and weak acid lotions to the surface, the disease rapidly improved, and at the end of a month appeared cured. In a week after this time I was again called to the children, and found that, in consequence of an error in diet, and inattention to the state of the digestive functions, the disease had reappeared,

but was speedily checked by a repetition of the preceding treatment.

LICHEN CIRCUMSCRIPTUS.—A lady of middle age had been suffering, for nearly a fortnight, with most distressing pruritus on the calf of the left leg, which demanded all her fortitude to resist tearing with her nails. The disease occupied an area of about three inches in diameter, was of a dull-red colour, and evidently formed of numerous minute pimples closely aggregated together. There were no other pimples on any portion of her body. Finding her appetite bad, and strength much impaired, I ordered her infusion of gentian, with sulphate of magnesia, in the proportion of a drachm to the half-pint, internally; and an emollient bath, containing bran, every night, at bed-time, to the affected leg, brushing the surface of the disease every morning with a solution of nitrate of silver, two grains to the ounce. By the tenth day the patch had lost all its redness and pruritus, was covered with a thin furfuraceous desquamation, and the tone of her digestive organs and general strength had greatly improved. She has remained well of the affection since that time, and is now much better in health than she has felt for several preceding years.

Upper Charlotte-street, Fitzroy-square.

RHEUMATISM.

ALTERATIVE TREATMENT.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—The insertion of the following case in your valuable Journal will much oblige yours, obediently,

JOHN BRADY.

15, Charlotte-street, Blackfriars'-road,
March 12th, 1840.

Mr. S., a gentleman, aged 32, having been afflicted with rheumatism for several years, brought on, as he imagined, from sleeping in a damp bed, whilst travelling in the country, came under my care about 18 months ago, suffering most acutely. Such were his sufferings, that, day and night, he was in constant pain, and was compelled to leave his bed, in order to lie before a large fire, with the view of obtaining temporary relief. Having tried the usual means recommended in rheumatism, such as colchicum, both in the form of tincture, extract, and powder, combined with morphia, hyoscyamus, nitrate of potassa, Dover's powder, and several other combinations, attending at the same time to the secretions, without obtaining any but temporary relief, I was persuaded that his was not the usual kind of rheumatism, and, consequently, I inquired minutely into the history of his case, and also whether any of his family ever suffered

from the same malady. I was then informed that his mother had been a martyr to it, and that a brother suffered severely, at different periods of the year, from attacks of a similar character. From the peculiar symptoms of my present patient, I was led to suspect that there might be some syphilitic taint in the system, and thereon made inquiry into his early habits of life, but became satisfied that such was not the case, inasmuch as he had never had disease of any kind, which would be likely to cause the circumstances to arise of which he now complained. The symptoms which excited my suspicions were the following:—Great tenderness of the sternum, upon touch; and pains along the course of the tibia (without any enlargement), the pains being more severe at night. I should here state that, previous to his consulting me, he had been under the care of several medical men, and had had consultations with some of the most eminent men in the profession; all of whom agreed that it was rheumatism.

Finding that the means adopted at first gave but temporary relief, and that his system was, in a great measure, giving way to the effects of his disease, I recommended a change of climate, and, at my suggestion, he went to France; but, finding no benefit from the change, he consulted a medical practitioner there, but without any beneficial result. He returned to me, dejected very much, and impressed with the idea that he should ever be a sufferer. Thinking that an alterative plan of treatment might be attended with some benefit to him, I prescribed the following:—

Comp. extract of sarsa., 6 dr.;

Iodine, $\frac{1}{2}$ gr.;

Iodi. of potass, $\frac{1}{2}$ dr.;

Boiling water, 6 oz. A fourth part thrice a-day.

Hydroc. of morphia, 1 gr.;

Sulph. of quinine, 9 grs.;

Blue pill, 10 grs.;

Rhubarb pill, 12 grs. Make nine pills; one thrice a-day.

I ordered, at the same time, light and digestible food, the beneficial results of which treatment, I am happy to say, became very apparent after the first week, and, to use his own expression, he felt the disease, as it were, being torn from him, and expressed his conviction that this plan of treatment would eventually cure him. I followed it up for two months, occasionally leaving out the morphia and the pil. hydr. His system generally improved, his appetite increased, and sleep, with which he was formerly unacquainted, followed (almost as a necessary result). This could not have been effected directly through the medium of the morphia, as I had frequently before given him as much as a grain and a half, without producing much sleep. He is now in robust health,