

Observations respecting an ulcer of peculiar character, which attacks the eye-lids and other parts of the face / by Arthur Jacob.

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OBSERVATIONS
RESPECTING
AN ULCER OF PECULIAR CHARACTER,
WHICH
ATTACKS THE EYE-LIDS AND OTHER PARTS
OF THE FACE.

By ARTHUR JACOB, M. D.

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ATTEMPTS to establish the specific character of a particular disease, however fruitless they may prove, are attended with the advantage of promoting accuracy of observation, and exciting minute inquiry. With the hope that such may, in some degree, be the case in the present instance with respect to the obscure subject of tumors and ulcers, I am induced to call the attention of surgeons to a disease, which, although probably observed by many, has never, I believe, been accurately described. I allude to a destructive ulceration of peculiar character which I have observed to attack and destroy the eyelids, and extend to the eye-ball, orbit, and face. The characteristic

features of this disease are, the extraordinary slowness of its progress, the peculiar condition of the edges and surface of the ulcer, the comparatively inconsiderable suffering produced by it, its incurable nature unless by extirpation, and its not contaminating the neighbouring lymphatic glands. The slowness with which this disease proceeds is very remarkable ; of three cases which have come under my observation, one, that which is represented in the annexed engraving, had existed for four years, and now presents no remarkable difference when compared with the drawing, which was executed six months ago : the eye-ball, exposed and dissected out as it has been by the ulceration, remains precisely in the same state, and the edges occupy the same situation as at that period. In another case, now also under my observation, the patient, an unmarried woman aged fifty-five, states, that the disease has existed for twenty-three years without having ever healed ; her eye-ball also has been exposed by the ulceration for nearly a year, and has not yet been totally destroyed. In the third case, that of a gentleman about sixty years of age, the disease existed for about nine years previous to his death, which took place from a different cause.

The sufferings of persons labouring under this disease do not appear to be very acute ; there is no lancinating pain, and the principal distress appears to arise from the exposure, by ulceration of nerves or other highly sensible parts. In the ex.

amples which I have met, the disease at the worst period did not incapacitate the patients from following their usual occupations ; the gentleman, to whom I have alluded, was cheerful, and enjoyed the comforts of social life after the disease had made the most deplorable ravages.

In two of those three cases, I have been unable to ascertain with certainty the nature of the disease at its commencement ; whether the ulceration was preceded by tubercle, encysted tumor, or wart. The account given by the patient from whom the drawing has been made, a poor woman aged fifty, is, that it arose from a blow, and commenced on the temple at a short distance from the external angle of the eye. The other woman, whose disease has existed for twenty-three years, says, that it was preceded by " a kernel under the skin over the eye-brow, which was not rough like a wart, and which existed for two or three years before it came to a head, when she picked it, after which it never healed." I quote her own words : it was probably an encysted tumor. In the gentleman's case the disease commenced in an old cicatrix, the consequence of confluent small pox : it was at the inner angle of the eye, and constantly moistened by the tears, which could not escape into the nose, the *puncta* being closed.

This disease may be observed under two very different conditions, either in a state of ulceration, or in a fixed state, in which no progress is made

toward healing. In this latter condition the parts present the following appearances : the edges are elevated, smooth and glossy, with a serpentine outline ; and are occasionally formed into a range of small tubercles or elevations : the skin in the vicinity is not thickened or discolored. The part within the edges is in some places a perfectly smooth, vascular, secreting surface, having veins of considerable size ramifying over it ; which veins occasionally give way, causing slight hæmorrhage ; in other places the surface appears covered by florid healthy looking granulations, firm in texture, and remaining unchanged in size and form for a great length of time. The surface sometimes even heals over in patches, which are hard, smooth, and marked with the venous ramifications to which I have alluded. This healing may take place on any part of the surface, whatever may be the original structure : in the case from which I have had this drawing made, the eyeball itself, denuded as it is by ulceration, is partially cicatrized over. When the ulceration commences it proceeds slowly, cutting away all parts indiscriminately which may be in the direction in which it spreads : the surface in this state is not so florid, and presents none of the glistening or granulated appearance above noticed : the pain is generally greater at this period. It appears also that there is a tendency to reparation, exclusive of the cicatrization which I have mentioned : there is a deposition of new material, a filling up, in certain places, which gives a uniformity to the

surface which should otherwise be very irregular, from the nature of the parts destroyed. When the disease extends to the bones, they sometimes exfoliate in scales of small size, but more generally they are destroyed, as the soft parts, by an ulcerative process. The discharge from the surface is not of the description called by surgeons unhealthy or sanious, but yellow, and of proper consistence; neither is there more fætor than from the healthiest sore, if the parts be kept perfectly clean, and be dressed frequently. There is no fungous growth, nor indeed any elevation, except at the edges, as already noticed, and even this is sometimes very inconsiderable. There is no considerable bleeding from the surface, and when it does occur, it arises from the superficial veins giving way, and not from sloughing or ulceration opening vessels: sometimes the surface assumes a dark gangrenous appearance, which I have found to arise from the effusion of blood beneath. I have not observed that the lymphatic glands were in the slightest degree contaminated, the disease being altogether extended by ulceration from the point from whence it commences.

After the preceding description it is scarcely necessary to state additional arguments to prove that the disease is peculiar in its nature, and not to be confounded with genuine *carcinoma*, or with the disease called *lupus* or *noli me tangere*. From the former it is distinguished by the absence of lancinating pain, fungous growth, fætor, slough,

hæmorrhage, or contamination of lymphatics ; from the latter by the absence of the furfuraceous scabs, and inflamed margins, as well as by the general appearance of the ulcer, its progress, and history. It is equally distinct from the ulcer with cauliflower-like fungous growth, which occasionally attacks old cicatrices.

It remains to be determined whether this disease can be removed by any other means than the knife or powerful escharotics ; and from the experience I have had in those cases, I am inclined to conclude that it bids defiance to all remedies short of extirpation. I have tried internally alterative mercurials, antimony, sarsaparilla, acids, cicuta, arsenic, iron, and other remedies, and locally, simple and compound poultices, ointments, and washes, containing mercury, lead, zinc, copper, arsenic, sulphur, tar, cicuta, opium, belladonna, nitrate of silver, and acids, without arresting for a moment the progress of the disease. I have indeed observed that one of those cases which is completely neglected, and left without any other dressing than a piece of rag, is slower in its progress than another which has had all the resources of surgery exhausted upon it. The success even of powerful escharotics is doubtful. Mary Sherlock, the old woman who has laboured under the disease for twenty-three years, and who is now in the Incurable Hospital, says that "a burning cancer plaster" was applied several times, seventeen years ago, and she has lately had the arsenical

composition, called Plunkett's Powder, applied without any good effect. The gentleman to whose case I have alluded, had the sore healed, when it was very small, by the free application of lunar caustic, under the care of Mr. Travers; it however broke out again, and spread without interruption, until it destroyed the lids and globe of the eye, under which circumstances he, in despair, submitted himself to a popular charlatan, who, bold and fearless from ignorance, gave a full trial to escharotics: he repeatedly applied, what I understood to have been a solution of muriate of mercury in strong nitric acid, and in a short time excavated a hideous cavern, extending from the orbital plate of the frontal bone above, to the floor of the maxillary sinus below, and from the ear on the outside, to the septum narium within; yet the unfortunate gentleman survived, but the disease preserved in every respect its original character. Mr. Colles however tells me, that in a case which came under his care before the disease had extended to the lids, he succeeded in establishing a permanent cure by the application of a powerful escharotic, covering up the eye during the operation of the remedy with gold beater's leaf.

Such is the information which I have to communicate respecting this malady: I offer it with the hope that surgeons who have met with similar examples, may be induced to give the result of their experience respecting it. Sufficient has

however been ascertained to prove, that when the disease exists in a situation which admits of it, the sooner it is completely extirpated by the knife, or the actual or potential cautery, the better chance is afforded the patient of relief from a most distressing and fatal malady.

