

Observations on some forms of inflammation and irritation of the bladder and vagina / by Lombe Atthill.

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Atthill, Lombe, 1827-1910.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

Publication/Creation

[Dublin] : [publisher not identified], 1866.

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(14.)
[Reprinted from the Dublin Quarterly Journal of Medical Science, May, 1866.]

OBSERVATIONS
ON SOME FORMS OF
INFLAMMATION AND IRRITATION
OF THE
BLADDER AND VAGINA.

BY
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[Read before the Dublin Obstetrical Society, 16th April, 1866.]

There are no forms of disease productive of greater distress and suffering than those affections of the bladder which are met with not only in married but unmarried females; and yet, while far from being uncommon, they seem to have attracted but comparatively little notice. Dr. Churchill has an excellent chapter on "Reflex Irritation of the Bladder" in the last edition of his work on disease of woman, and the late Professor Montgomery read an interesting paper a few years ago on "The Sympathy between the Uterus and Bladder," before the Medical Society of the College of Physicians; but I do not remember having seen the subject noticed elsewhere. I therefore thought the following remarks, founded on cases recently under my observation, would not be deemed uninteresting.

In considering these affections, it is necessary to divide them into three classes, which, while presenting great similarity in their general symptoms, depend on very different causes, and require for their cure very different treatment. We have, then,

1st. Those in which inflammation of the mucous membrane of the bladder occurs as a primary disease, either of an acute or chronic character.

2nd. Those in which inflammation, always in a chronic form, exists

in the bladder, this inflammation being generally a secondary affection, depending on some unhealthy action in the vagina or uterus, but occasionally being a primary affection, the anomalous action in the uterus or vagina being secondary to it.

3rd. Those affections of a purely reflex nature, in which, while all the symptoms are referred to the bladder, that organ is perfectly healthy, they being entirely due to, and caused by, some irritation, morbid sensibility, or inflammatory action, in uterus or its appendage.

The first of these forms does not fall particularly within the province of the obstetric practitioner. Every physician and surgeon is familiar with its character and symptoms. I shall not, therefore, dwell on the subject, but merely mention a few particulars of one case, which was mainly remarkable from the large quantity of pus secreted by the bladder, with comparatively slight constitutional disturbance.

An unmarried lady, aged about forty-five, was seized with a rigor, after exposure to cold. When I saw her some hours subsequently, she presented the symptoms of an ordinary febrile attack. She also complained of very acute pain in the back, which distressed her greatly. On the following day there was no improvement; on the contrary, the pain in the back was worse, and there was also a sense of soreness above the pubes, which was increased by pressure. In addition to general treatment, linseed poultices and other local applications were had recourse to, but with very partial benefit. On the next day she was, if anything, worse, constant desire to micturate being now a prominent and distressing symptom. I shall not, however, weary you with details of ordinary treatment; it is sufficient to say that on the eighth day of her illness I observed pus in the urine, and that it continued to be secreted in large quantities for a considerable time. The exact quantity which was daily voided could not be accurately ascertained, as it was mixed with mucus and other deposits, but certainly it could not have been less than three ounces daily. Nevertheless the patient improved; the pus gradually diminished in quantity, she was convalescent in about a month, and has since that time, now more than a year ago, enjoyed excellent health.

Cases coming under the second head are by no means unfrequent. In them we have well-marked symptoms of irritation, if not of inflammation, of the bladder co-existing with some unhealthy state of the uterus or vagina, and sometimes of the ovaries also. The existence or non-existence of actual inflammation of the bladder being that which distinguishes these, from those in which the symptoms are due to mere sympathy or reflex irritation, the cases we now alluded to form a most important class, the treatment of which require special care, for we are apt to fall into error if, having detected disease in one set of organs sufficient, probably, to account for all the symptoms, we neglect to investigate the condition of the others, and it by no means always

happens that the cure of the one affection, even though it should have been the primary, will be followed by that of the other, unless special treatment be adopted for its relief. The following case will, I think, illustrate this view:—

About a year ago I was consulted by letter relative to the case of a young lady residing in the country. The statement I received was to the effect “that the patient had been an invalid for nearly eight years. Her illness first began with a feeling of weight and distress in the lower part of the abdomen. This was so great as to prevent her walking, and was accompanied by pain all over the lower portion of the abdomen, and in the back. There was also irritation and pain about the vulva, especially during micturition, which always caused considerable distress. After she had suffered in this way for about three months, she was attacked with acute pain in right side of the abdomen. This was followed by shivering fits, which came on at intervals of about a fortnight. After a time a tumour was detected in the right side. The rigors and attacks of pain continued, however, to recur at nearly regular intervals for about a year, when they ceased, and from that time her condition began gradually to improve. For the last six years she has been perfectly free from these distressing symptoms, and of late fancied that the tumour had rather decreased in size; her general health, also, became pretty good; but the pain and soreness across the abdomen, immediately above the pubes, still remained. This prevented her walking, or indeed making any exertion. She also constantly suffered from considerable uneasiness in her side; but that which caused her the greatest distress, and indeed made life a burden, was the incessant desire to micturate, she being seldom able to remain more than an hour, never more than an hour and a-half, without passing water, and this even when in bed.”

As I declined to give any opinion, unless I had an opportunity of seeing and examining the case, the lady came to town, and placed herself under my care. I should mention that I also received a communication from her medical attendant, a gentleman who is in considerable practice in the country. He stated that “the tumour in Miss ——’s side puzzled him very much. To his knowledge it had existed for upwards of seven years. At one time he thought it had changed its position, having been low down in the inguinal region, whereas it now lay nearly under the ribs; he had never been able to detect any attachment to the other organs, and candidly admitted that he was unable to give an opinion as to its nature; but that by far the most distressing symptom in the case was the extraordinary irritation of the bladder and vagina from which this young lady suffered, and which of late had become much more severe—so much so that life was a burden to her. He had tried all kind of treatment, tonics, sedatives, alkalines, and acids, without benefit. Sometimes he thought that a tumour or calculus might exist in the

bladder; but as the symptoms were vague, and the patient a diffident unmarried woman, he had not considered himself justified in making a special examination." I found Miss — to be a very thin delicate-looking young lady, aged about twenty-six or twenty-seven years. Her colour was good, nor was there any unhealthy look about her. I did not obtain much additional information from her replies to my questions, except that she had from time to time been under the care of several medical men (among the rest that of the late Mr. Rynd, who had blistered her side), without obtaining any relief. The tumour referred to was very easily felt immediately under the ribs, the upper extremities being quite close to the liver; indeed, I think when lying on her back it must have been in contact with that organ. It was about six inches in length, and probably nearly four inches in circumference. It was completely above the pelvis, and certainly was not ovarian.

Handling it did not cause much pain, though she stated that occasionally it was very tender to the touch. She also informed me that at the very commencement of her illness, and before the tumour was detected, she was conscious of a sensation as if something had given way in her side. The tumour was, however, evidently totally unconnected with the affection of the bladder. It was not in contact with it, and pressure, even though made forcibly downwards, did not cause any uneasiness in that organ; therefore, though its size and weight must have caused considerable distress, her sufferings could not arise from that cause.

On proceeding to examine the condition of the uterus, vagina, and bladder, I found the former to be normal in size, and apparently healthy, but the vagina was very tender to the touch, and its mucous membrane greatly congested. I introduced a silver catheter into the bladder, but it did not contain either calculus or tumour. The urine was pale, of low specific gravity, and contained a considerable deposit, consisting mainly of mucus, with a small quantity of pus mixed through it. The analysis of the urine was made by my friend Dr. Head. The presence of pus in the urine, taken into consideration with the whole history of the case, led me to conclude that this lady was suffering from chronic inflammation of the mucous membrane of the bladder; that the inflammation of the bladder was probably the primary disease, that of the vagina the secondary; that the attack, originally acute, having been overlooked or neglected, had assumed a chronic form, and now gave rise to the distress this patient suffered. Acting on this supposition, I proceeded to treat the case by injecting the bladder with a solution containing ten grains of nitrate of silver dissolved in two ounces distilled water, to which was added, at the moment of use, twenty drops of opium wine. This treatment was steadily persevered in, the bladder being injected every third day. When first employed this gave considerable pain, but after a little time ceased to cause any distress, and I was now able to increase the

strength of the solution, and used ten grains to the ounce of water. The result of this treatment was very striking—in less than a fortnight she was able to retain her urine for fully two hours and a-half during the day, and for more than three hours at the night. Before another fortnight elapsed she was still farther improved, and now was seldom disturbed more than once during the night, and in the daytime easily passed three hours without inconvenience or distress. But at this point improvement ceased, and I was disappointed at finding that the inflammation of the vagina had but slightly diminished; as this produced considerable distress, I, though with reluctance (the patient being unmarried), made use of the speculum, and applied a twenty-grain solution of nitrate of silver to the whole surface of the vagina, every portion of which was intensely congested. This treatment I repeated twice a week for some time, at the same time persevering with the injection to the bladder. At the end of two months from the time that I first saw her she returned home, her condition being in all respects greatly improved. She was much stronger, had gained strength, and, though still unable to walk any distance without distress, could spend several hours daily in the open air. She could, without inconvenience, retain urine for more than three hours, and was never disturbed more than once at night, and that generally at about 5 o'clock, a.m. I have heard from her repeatedly since. She continued to enjoy what she describes as "great comfort;" and in one letter says, "I hardly know myself so great is the relief I have experienced."

The treatment employed in this case was suggested to me by the late Dr. Hutton. He was treating in this way a lady who was suffering from a severe form of inflammation of the bladder, when ill-health compelled him to go abroad, and he advised me to continue it with her for some time longer, the patient having placed herself under my care. On that occasion he told me that it was the only treatment he had found of any benefit in such cases, but that it was necessary to continue it for a considerable time, and in severe cases for not less than three months; and the results which have followed its use in my hands fully confirm the truth of this opinion.

In the foregoing there was no doubt but that inflammation of the mucous membrane of the bladder existed; but in by far the greater number of instances which come under the observation of the obstetric practitioner such is not the case. The patient refers her symptoms to the bladder, but on investigation that organ proves to be perfectly healthy. Dr. Churchill is the only writer who has called special attention to this subject. Dr. Montgomery, in the paper already referred to, narrates the particulars of cases in which a marked sympathy existed between the uterus and bladder, but he seems to have overlooked the most important, because the most common, of all the causes which give rise to this most distressing affection which is termed by Dr.

Churchill "reflex irritation of the bladder"—I mean, inflammation of the vagina itself. We have all seen instances in which cancer of the uterus, or even simple ulceration of the cervix, gives rise to irritation of the bladder, but after all they are (at least so far as my own observations go) rare in comparison with the cases in which vaginitis, simple and uncomplicated, is the sole cause. The existence of vaginitis itself is often overlooked, and instances have occurred to me in which the patient was assured that there was nothing wrong with her, because the os uteri alone was looked at, and the vagina itself, though intensely inflamed, entirely forgotten. I do not now allude to acute inflammation of the vagina, which occasionally follows parturition, nor to the acute attacks which sometimes come on after injuries or excessive sexual intercourse, but to the chronic varieties, which are met with frequently in practice. They are, I think, more commonly seen in the weakly and delicate than in the robust female. Frequent desire to make water, and, in severe cases, constant straining to do so, pruritus, sometimes smarting under micturition, and, not unfrequently, pain above the pubes, are the most common symptoms. In married women the act of coition often gives pain, and when this is the case the inflammation will be found to have extended almost to the vulva. This last symptom will aid in distinguishing vaginitis from ulceration of the os or cervix uteri, in which it is seldom observed, especially if it be of a cancerous nature. I lately saw a patient in whom nearly the entire of the cervix had been destroyed by cancerous ulceration, yet she did not suffer from irritation of the bladder, and sexual intercourse was painless. An examination of the vagina with the speculum, in patients suffering from vaginitis, generally gives pain; but a speculum must be used, for it is essential not only to see the condition of the mucous membrane of the vagina, but to apply our remedies through it. There is no occasion, however, to use a large instrument; a small speculum will answer equally well, and give much less distress to the patient. The vagina, on examination, will be found to present either an uniform deep red tint, or else to be covered with white aphthous looking patches, or even sometimes with a herpetic eruption. In either case a cure of the local disease will be generally affected by the application of a solution of nitrate of silver, joined to the use of a cold or tepid douche twice a day, and a tonic treatment; purgatives, except in cases of plethoric women, are to be avoided. Some patients will bear the application of a thirty or forty grain solution of nitrate of silver without its causing pain, but sometimes even a weak solution produces much suffering, and in one instance, that of a delicate married woman, I was obliged to discontinue its use altogether. This fact suggested to my mind the idea of applying, in similar instances, the caustic solution in the shape of spray, by means of one of "Maunders' spray producers," and though I have only used it in a couple of cases, I think it well worth a trial. You can apply the

spray through a speculum equally and evenly to all parts of the vagina, without irritating the inflamed surface by the contact of a rough brush or piece of lint. Rest in the horizontal position, if you can get the patient to carry it out, is, in severe cases, of great benefit. As the inflammation of the vagina subsides, the irritation of the bladder diminishes; and, if it depend solely on that cause, will probably entirely disappear. Vaginitis, though more frequent in married women, is not unfrequently met with in the single. I have seen it in three patients who were undoubtedly virgins, one of whom, a strong, healthy looking country girl, suffered so intensely from irritation of the bladder that life was a burden to her; yet the bladder, in her case, was perfectly healthy. In addition to vaginitis, reflex irritation of the bladder may be caused by inflammation, erosion, or ulceration of the cervix uteri, or by that condition of the canal of the cervix which gives rise to uterine leucorrhea. There is also one other affection which I have noticed as causing it—I mean simple hypertrophy of the uterus. This, which is not very common, seldom benefits much from treatment. It is, I think, generally met with in women who have reached middle life, and are otherwise healthy. It appears to me to act merely mechanically. The enlarged uterus pressing against the neck of the bladder irritates it, as it sometimes does in the very earliest stage of pregnancy. I recently saw an instance of this in a lady who has not long returned from India, where she had resided for several years. She had never been pregnant. The uterus, otherwise healthy, was much enlarged, and she suffered considerably from irritation of the bladder, especially during the early part of the day. I have also seen very similar cases in other patients who have resided in India, and I cannot help thinking that the habit of taking riding exercise, which is very common there, and sometimes even, as this lady acknowledged, during the menstrual period, must, by determining an undue amount of blood to the uterus, predispose to hypertrophy of that organ.

