

**An address delivered at the opening of the section of diseases of children,  
at the annual meeting of the British Medical Association in Liverpool,  
August 1883 / by Samuel Gee.**

### **Contributors**

Gee, Samuel (Samuel Jones), 1839-1911.  
British Medical Association.  
Royal College of Physicians of London

### **Publication/Creation**

Place of publication not identified : Publisher not identified, 1883.

### **Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/p5bmw663>

### **Provider**

Royal College of Physicians

### **License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by Royal College of Physicians, London. The original may be consulted at Royal College of Physicians, London. where the originals may be consulted. This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

5178

St. John's 2-9-34

Referred to the Author from the

AN A  
SECTION

THE SECTION OF  
At the Annual Meeting of  
Lip

By SAMUEL  
Foster to R. Hutchinson's B

A SURVEY OF THE LIT  
GE

In all studies of this kind, among the numerous topics one which is devoted to the study of dentition. It is a common disorder of children, cough, convulsions, and fever, usually related to "drowsy" identity in modern practice. the name of the Aphorisms, children's diseases: e.g., in the newborn children: aphasia, or inflammation of the nasal, & the approach of dentition: pro- duction, especially in cutting are particularly fat, and in somewhat older: affections of at the various text the very accurate, unobscured, etc. But, in all the Hippocratic treatises most interesting by far, is the which we find at the beginning I believe we may affirm that is accurate of that one of the very rare. Although many is thus recorded, yet has it been the I will remember that Felix N specific form of parotitis which and Aristotle. I do not recall diseases worth notice, nor need have to say upon our topic.

The name of Erasistratus must be earliest writer of a treatise upon it is: for the chapters, which is of disquisition, often showed us of Erasistratus, there is little or no middle of the sixth century, in notion, inasmuch as the earliest records bear his name.

The seven hundred years we and Francis Glisson, added have most mention the first Eng

[Reprinted for the Author from the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL, Aug. 4th, 1883.]

## AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF

### THE SECTION OF DISEASES OF CHILDREN,

*At the Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association in  
Liverpool, August 1883.*

By SAMUEL GEE, M.D., F.R.C.P.,

Physician to St. Bartholomew's Hospital and to the Hospital for Sick Children.

#### A SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE OF THE DISEASES OF CHILDHOOD.

IN all studies of this kind, we turn to Hippocrates first of all. Among the numerous treatises which bear his name, there is only one which is devoted to the pathology of children, and that is the essay on dentition. It is a chain of aphorisms, concerning the common disorders of children who are teething; vomiting, diarrhoea, cough, convulsions, and fever are mentioned, but almost half the treatise relates to "ulcers of the tonsils," a disease difficult to identify in modern practice. In the work which especially bears the name of the *Aphorisms*, there are some slight references to children's diseases: *e.g.*, in bk. iii., aph. 24, 25, 26. "To little and newborn children: aphthæ, vomiting, coughs, sleeplessness, frights, inflammation of the navel, watery discharges from the ears; at the approach of dentition: pruritus of the gums, fevers, convulsions, diarrhoea, especially in cutting the canine teeth, and in those who are particularly fat, and have constipated bowels; to persons somewhat older: affections of the tonsils, incurvation of the spine at the vertebra next the occiput, asthma, calculus, round worms, ascarides, acrochordon, satyriasmus, choerades, and other phymata." But, in all the Hippocratic treatises, the passage which is, for us, the most interesting by far, is that remarkable description of mumps, which we find at the beginning of the first book of the *Epidemics*. I believe we may affirm that it is the only description left us by the ancients of that one of the very few acute specific diseases which they knew. Although mumps is thus the earliest acute specific disease to be recorded, yet has it been the last to gain universal acceptance; you will remember that Felix Niemeyer does not admit the acute specific form of parotitis which we call mumps. In Celsus, Aretæus, and Aurelian I do not recollect anything relative to children's diseases worth notice, nor need I refer to the little which Paulus has to say upon our topic.

The name of Rhazes must be held in honour by us; for he is the earliest writer of a treatise upon the diseases of children; such as it is; for the chapters, which are very short, consist almost wholly of therapeutics, often absurd enough. Of semeiology, or description of disease, there is little or nothing. Rhazes was born about the middle of the ninth century, in Persia. He has another claim to our notice, inasmuch as the earliest extant writings upon small-pox and measles bear his name.

The seven hundred years which passed away between Rhazes and Francis Glisson, added hardly anything to knowledge. Yet I must mention the first English book upon children's diseases,



namely, "*The Boke of Childerne*, composed by Thomas Phayer, studiouse in Philosophie and Physicke," published in 1544. This is that same Phayer who is better known as a translator of a part of the *Aeneid*. It is clear that Phayer's book is founded upon Rhazes, who is referred to in several places, and in one is spoken of as "Rasis, a solemne practitioner among phisicians." But Phayer's list of diseases is fuller than that of Rhazes, and perhaps it will not be found wearisome to read the heads of the sundry chapters of Phayer's little book.

The sixteenth century was rife in Latin poetry, and even in medicine the poets found work for their muses. You all know the name of Fracastorius, the author of the poem called *Syphilis*, in three books. (I may just say, in this place, that Paracelsus was the first to mention inherited syphilis, in 1529.) Fifty-four years after the appearance of Fracastorius's poem—namely, in 1584—Gaucher de Sainte Marthe, or Scaevola Sammarthanus (as he Latinised his name), published a poem, also in three books, called *Pædotrophia*—that is to say, the rearing of children. The first book relates to the foetus, or, what is the same thing, to the management of pregnant women; the second, to the management of sucklings; and the third, to their diseases. Ste. Marthe was a French gentleman, but not, as might be supposed, a physician. His merits as a Latin poet I will not pretend to gauge. Some have held his *Pædotrophia* to fall not far short of the *Georgics*; and it might be asked why the rearing of babies should sound more like burlesque in a poem than the rearing of corn, vines, and cattle. Be this as it may, the poem has been translated into English twice. The earlier translation is anonymous, and was published in 1710; the latter is by H. W. Tytler, M.D., and appeared in 1797. Tytler's version is closer to the original, but dull; whilst there is a coarse vigour about the earlier translation which makes it amusing.

Here I may just allude to an Italian poem upon the suckling of children, written about 1560, by Luigi Tausillo; the title, *La Balia*, or *The Nurse*; and it was deemed worthy of translation by the eminent citizen of Liverpool, William Roscoe. The second edition, which I possess, bears date 1800. The author denounces wet-nurses, and exhorts the Italian ladies themselves to suckle their children.

Leaving this laureate fraternity of poets, let me speak of a little book entitled "*De Morbis Puerorum, or, a Treatise of the Diseases of Children, etc.*" By Robert Pemell, Practitioner in Physick at Cranebrooke in Kent. May the 29, 1653." He, no doubt, practised among the rich clothiers who then dwelt in the Weald of Kent, and in Cranbrook especially. His book is an improvement upon Phayer's, yet perhaps it is hardly too much to say that there had been no great increase of knowledge since the time of Rhazes, or even of Hippocrates.

But better things were at hand. On the thirtieth page of this book, Pemell refers to "a learned treatise set forth lately by three or four doctors," on rickets. This was no other than Glisson's "*De Rachitide sive Morbo Puerili, qui vulgo The Rickets dicitur, Tractatus*," first published in 1650. Glisson marks the beginning of a new epoch in the knowledge of children's diseases, and may be said to hold a place like that of Vesalius in human anatomy, of Harvey in physiology, of Morgagni in morbid anatomy, and of Laënnec in semeiology. There can be no doubt that Glisson discovered rickets, yet he was not the first to print a book upon the subject. He spent more than five years in writing his treatise, and he was helped by other Fellows of the College of Physicians; so that rickets had been much talked about before the appearance of Glisson's book, and he was forestalled by those who had the pen of a ready writer. I may mention Theophilus de Garencieres, who is said to have pub-



lished at London, in 1647, a small book upon rickets, entitled *Angliae Flagellum, seu Tabes Anglica*, which I have not seen.<sup>1</sup> In 1649, Arnold Boot published, at London, a small book entitled *Observationes Medicæ de Affectibus Omissis*, the twelfth chapter of which contains a description of "tabes pectoræa," or rickets. But what shall I say of Daniel Whistler, who, in 1684, published in London an essay upon rickets, which he pretended to be a reprint of an academical thesis which he had first printed in 1645, or five years before Glisson's book appeared? I cannot help thinking that too much trust has been put upon Whistler's word of honour. Haller, for instance, in his *Bibliotheca Medica Practica* (1777) speaks (vol. ii, p. 706) of an academical disputation, *De Morbo Puerili dicto Rickets*, published at Leyden in 1645 by Daniel Whist (*sic*). The mistake in Whistler's name makes it doubtful whether Haller had seen the disputation which he quotes. Dr. Norman Moore, some years ago, caused inquiries after this alleged thesis of Whistler's to be made at Leyden, and he tells me that they know nothing about it there. It was in 1684, the year wherein Whistler published his essay in London, that he died in well-deserved disgrace, having robbed the College of Physicians, of which he was then President. Wherefore, in that year, his word of honour was about as trustworthy as a dicer's oath. In short, Dr. Moore believes, and I agree with him, that Whistler's academical disputation of 1645 may be but another of Whistler's frauds.

Glisson, I say, discovered rickets. He asserts that rickets was a new disease, which had first appeared in Dorset and Somerset about 1620. But Glisson was born in Dorset in 1597; so that in 1620 he would be twenty-three years old; and the doubt rises whether the newness belonged to the disease, or to the mental eye of the young man. In general I am not disposed to put much faith in the upspringing of new diseases. I find it more easy to believe that they have been overlooked; still more, that they have been confounded. I find it more easy to believe that men have been blind, rather than that nature has been inconstant during the few hundred years which go to make up written history. Else we must suppose that a new Pandora has emptied her box upon our unhappy age, so many are the new diseases which we know only too well, and our fathers knew not all. I can believe that morbid poisons spread from one part of the world to another, as the intercourse of men becomes more free. I can believe that syphilis first appeared in Europe at the end of the fifteenth century, and, if I could believe that rickets is nothing but a form of inherited syphilis, I would admit it to be possible that rickets arose about a hundred years later. Otherwise, if it be due to the operation of common causes, it must have existed so long as the present conditions of human life.

In the same shire of Dorset was born, twenty-seven years after Glisson, a man whose name is still more famous, Thomas Sydenham. In his writings we find the first clear references to three diseases of childhood, under their present names; I mean whooping-cough, Vitus' dance, and scarlet fever. But Sydenham makes no claim to have discovered these diseases; yet his descriptions are a starting point in their history. With regard to his description of scarlet fever, I must say that it seems to me to tally more with the scarlatiniform kind of roseola described by Dr. Maton, than with what we

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written I have, through the kindness of Dr. Allchin, perused the copy of *De Garencieres* which belongs to the Medical Society, and I find that the treatise does not relate to rickets at all, but to a kind of pulmonary consumption, not easy to identify. Yet the book has been largely quoted, especially by the Germans, as a treatise on rickets; the title I suppose misled them. The learning of too many goes no further than the title-page, and this at second hand.



call scarlet fever. I cannot omit to remind you that Sydenham has left us the first good and sufficient history of measles.

Sydenham was prone to jesting of that grave kind which dullards misunderstand. You remember the answer which he gave to Blackmore, who asked for advice as to medical books: "Read Don Quixote, sir." Dr. Walter Harris fell another victim to Sydenham's naughty habit. Harris had written a book, *De Morbis Acutis Infantum*; and, showing it to Sydenham, the great man said that it was the only book which he himself would fain have written. With this *imprimatur*, the book was republished several times, and translated three times into English—namely, by W. Cockburn, M.D., John Martyn, and by an anonymous hand in a collection of tracts on children's diseases published in 1742. Yet Harris's is a poor production; all that I have carried away from a perusal is, that he attended the son of the Right Hon. the Earl of This, and the daughter of the Right Rev. the Bishop of That, to say nothing about people of inferior quality.

With the eighteenth century, books upon our topic become numerous. Most of them are bad enough, but those which were written to teach (or to catch) the people, are by far the worst. Some of these books of advice to mothers, on the rearing, and feeding, and nursing of children, sick and well, are, indeed, masterpieces of twaddle. It would almost seem as if the writers wished to make good the saying, that an old woman is the best doctor for a baby. Yet, perhaps, this excuse may be made, that the ignorance of most women is such that even twaddle is better than nothing.

Take Boerhaave's *Aphorisms* for a standard of knowledge at the beginning of the century, and you will find that teeth and worms, like two inauspicious planets, still rule the sphere of children's diseases. And mark the simplicity of this pathology—until two years of age, or a little later, children are breeding their teeth; afterwards, worms become common; so that, between the one and the other, we never need to fail for a diagnosis.

In the eighteenth century, children's diseases came to be much better understood in three particulars: namely, croup, tubercular meningitis, and the eruptive fevers. First, with regard to croup. It is spoken of under the name of "the croops," by Dr. Patrick Blair, in a letter to Dr. Richard Mead, dated Cowpar of Angus, July 6th, 1713, and published in a book entitled *Miscellaneous Observations*, etc., London, 1718 (p. 92). But Blair's description is very meagre, and the first adequate history of croup is Francis Home's, published at Edinburgh in 1765. The first bronchotomy in croup was performed by John Andree on February 11th, 1782, at Hertford, I believe. In a paper read before the Medical Society of London on October 31st, 1796, Henry Field first distinguished spasmodic from inflammatory croup.

Next, with regard to acute hydrocephalus, or tubercular meningitis, as we now call it. Single and ill-described cases of the disease were published by Dr. St. Clair and Mr. John Paisley before the appearance of the treatise of Robert Whytt. Yet no damage can be done to the claim brought forward on behalf of Whytt, that he must be deemed the discoverer of acute hydrocephalus, inasmuch as he was the first to write a history of the disease, in the true empiric sense of the word history. Whytt's *Observations* were published at Edinburgh in 1768, two years after his death.

Lastly, with regard to the eruptive fevers, small-pox and measles had been well distinguished by Sydenham. In 1730, Fuller affirmed that chicken-pox (or crystals, as he calls it) was a distinct disease. But Heberden's paper, read before the College of Physicians on August 11th, 1767, is the real beginning of our knowledge about chicken-pox. The anginal form of scarlet fever was first studied in



this century; Fothergill's *Account* appeared in 1748; and in 1779 Withering established the scarlatinal nature of the disease. In 1798, Edward Jenner published his *Inquiry into Cow-pox*. And, in order to complete this topic, I will just enter the next century, and refer to Maton's paper, read before the College of Physicians on April 4th, 1814, wherein the scarlatiniform variety of contagious roseola is first described.

Poets still found themes in our branch of knowledge. Dr. Hugh Downman, of Exeter, published, in 1774, the first instalment of a didactic poem entitled *Infancy; or the Management of Children*. The poem, complete in six books, was published in 1788. The copy I possess is called the sixth edition, and dated 1802. Unluckily, Downman writes in metre without rhyme, and blank verse opens the floodgates of prolixity.

We have now reached the nineteenth century, and literature becomes so immense that any chronicle and brief abstract of the time will be very defective. The great increase of knowledge in our age has been chiefly due to two causes, namely, to the study of morbid anatomy, and to the invention of the methods of physical examination, which are, indeed, the study of morbid anatomy in the living subject. In both these respects pre-eminent, the name of Laënnec at once comes to mind; and no man, since Hippocrates, has exerted so powerful an influence upon medicine as he. His fame as the inventor of auscultation has dimmed what would otherwise have been his fame as a morbid anatomist. And I must not forget Bayle, whose book on phthisis, published in 1810, and whose earlier papers, are the starting-point of the modern doctrine of tubercle; and how large a part tubercle plays in the pathology of children I need not say. Bretonneau's work upon diphtheria and typhoid fever was so original and so conclusive, that he may almost be said to have discovered those diseases. It was in France that inherited syphilis was first discussed in a manner such as the importance of the topic deserved. Duchenne discovered the pseudohypertrophic form of paralysis, and what he calls "obstetrical paralysis." And lastly, how successfully the pathology of the nervous system has been cultivated by living Frenchmen, you all know well.

Coming back to our own country, I will refer to the work of Willan upon skin-diseases; to John Clarke, whose description of laryngismus stridulus is the first which deserves notice; to William Charles Wells, the discoverer of scarlatinal albuminuria; to John Burne, whose papers upon typhlitis are the beginning of definite knowledge of that disease; and to George Gregory, of whom the same may be said with regard to tubercular peritonitis.

Dr. Bowditch of America is still alive, yet I cannot help alluding to his invention of the method of paracentesis which is now commonly called aspiration. It is true that the adaptation of a syringe to a cannula is as old as Anel, and perhaps older; but it is no less true that the chest was not aspirated before the day of Dr. Bowditch.

Lastly, I must mention the three most useful means of physical examination which we owe to Germany, namely, the thermometer, reintroduced by Wunderlich; the ophthalmoscope, invented by Helmholtz; and the laryngoscope of Türck and Czermak.

Before I sit down, I wish to bring before you one truth, which this sketch makes very clear. Looking over the names of the men whom we have celebrated, the men who have made our knowledge what it is, I do not find one who could be called a specialist in children's diseases; but the multitude are mad after specialties. No wonder; for we are the descendants of those who, in their sickness, worshipped fetishes and charms, or sought after star-gazers and the touch of kings. Our children will deem us to be,



in other respects, no less simple. Besides, it is a true saying that "the world suspects a man who can do two things well." As the poet says

"One science only will one genius fit ;  
So vast is art, so narrow human wit.

But art is not yet so vast, nor human wit so narrow, that the diseases of children need be made a specialty ; and I believe that none of us are specialists in the popular and evil sense of the word. For my own part, if I may speak so much of myself, being physician to a hospital for children, and to a much greater hospital for people of all ages, I can see that my knowledge of children's diseases would be much poorer and meaner than it is, were it not for the larger experience I gain at St. Bartholomew's. I wish that the governors of the general hospitals would make more provision for sick children, and then the need for special children's hospitals would pass away.