

Favus (Tinea favosa) : its treatment by depilation / [J. Warburton Begbie].

Contributors

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
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FAVUS (TINEA FAVOSA):

ITS TREATMENT BY DEPILATION.

(Reprinted from the *'Edinburgh Medical Journal,'* March, 1864.)

THIS interesting form of cutaneous affection, the truly parasitic nature of which is now generally admitted, has been of frequent occurrence in the hospital wards during the whole period of my service as physician. I have nothing to add to the accurate as well as detailed accounts of the disease which are to be found in the writings of such authors as Devergie, Hebra, and Bazin, on the Continent, and of Mr. Erasmus Wilson and Dr. M'Call Anderson, in our own country. The experience I have had of Favus has convinced me of its intimate connexion with filthiness of the head and body, of its ready communicability when favoured by the pre-existence of dirtiness, the predisposing cause of most importance, in the person exposed; and, lastly, of its eminently satisfactory treatment by one plan, and by that one plan only. In contrast, very favorably for the process of depilation, the different means for the cure of Favus affecting the scalp, which have been formerly witnessed, at various times, and in various places—and likewise employed by myself; and now, having obtained results so completely satisfactory, by the employment of depilation,—practised very nearly as M. Bazin has recommended it, I have relinquished all other expedients for effecting the removal of this frequently loathsome disease, and can confidently recommend depilation

as a most efficient remedy. Coupled with the depilatory process, however, must be, first of all, the thorough cleansing of the scalp, and then the employment of what are likewise styled *parasiticide* remedies, or still more strictly in relation to Favus, a disease dependent on the existence of a plant or vegetable-like parasite—*phyticides*. Of these a solution of the corrosive sublimate (one or two grains to the ounce of water, with the addition of a little alcohol or hydrochlorate of ammonia), the oleum juniperi pyrolignicum (huile de cade of the French), and the subsulphate of mercury (turpeth mineral), in the proportion of a scruple or half a drachm to the ounce of prepared lard, are the chief; and so long as the act of depilation is in progress, the diligent use of one or other of these parasite destroyers is to be enjoined. I have found the empyreumatic oil of juniper to be most serviceable; and from the year 1850, when I first saw it in use in the St. Louis Hospital at Paris, have been constantly in the habit of employing it in the treatment of the parasitic, as well as of the scaly, affections of the skin. The precise plan pursued in the treatment of all the cases of Favus recently under my care, is as follows:—On reception, the patient has at once a hot bath, and both head and body are as thoroughly as possible cleansed with the aid of soft soap; the hair of the head is then cut to the level of the Favus crusts, and, as Bazin has directed,¹ the oil of juniper (before mentioned) is applied by means of a thick camel-hair brush. On the succeeding day, poultices of potato-starch are placed over the head, and diligently continued till the complete separation of the crusts is effected. This done, the juniper oil is re-applied; and on the day following, the process of depilation commenced. While this is continued, the daily use of one or other of the phyticide applications is being made. Care should always be taken that the depilation is complete, and that it is persevered in until the growth of healthy-looking hairs over all parts of the scalp is observed. Thus the treatment may require *many weeks* for its thorough execution; but when it is held in remembrance that the cure effected is radical, its lengthened duration may well be tolerated.

The following, one of the most recent examples of Favus under my care, in which the trunk as well as the scalp was

¹ 'Leçons Théoriques et Cliniques sur les Affections Cutanées Parasitaires.' Professées par le Docteur Bazin. Paris, 1858. (See p. 138.)

affected, will serve as a further illustration of the treatment now described :

E. S—,¹ æt. 17, single, living in her sister's house at M., near Edinburgh, admitted into Ward XV, Royal Infirmary, in November 1863, suffering from well-marked Favus of the head and upper part of the back, which she says has existed since infancy. By the application of poultices, and by washing with black soap, her head has frequently become so clean as to lead her friends to believe that they had effected her relief from this offensive complaint ; but in seven or eight days the scalp had again become covered with yellow crusts, emitting the peculiar and characteristic odour. The patient has on several occasions been under medical treatment, but with a like result. She has always been well clothed and properly fed, taking animal food three or four times a-week. She has no other ailment, and has always enjoyed good health. Till within the last two years the disease was confined to the head ; but about that period a similar eruption began to show itself on the upper part of the back, and has since then extended over both shoulders. At present the scalp is almost entirely covered with dirty yellow crusts, and over it several patches of baldness exist. The eruption on the back possesses a brighter yellow colour than that on the head, extending on the left side from the top of the shoulder to the waist, and, transversely, from about the angles of the ribs to the spine ; the denser crusts being situated over the scapular region. The patient complains of much itching and uneasiness in the parts affected, but of no pain. The head and back having been carefully washed, while the hair was closely clipped on the former, the juniper oil was applied, and thereafter the removal of the crusts effected by poultices of potato-starch. This done, depilation was commenced, and at the same time the use of the following lotion, for both the head and back :

℞ Hydrargyri Sublimati Corrosivi, gr. xij ;
Ammoniā hydrochloratis, ℥i ;
Aquæ fontis, ℥vj. Solve.

The first depilation in this case was completed in about three weeks ; it has been continued till nearly the present time (13th February), so as to effect the removal of all the unhealthy-looking hairs which have re-appeared. Latterly, the following application, which I can strongly recommend as a phyticide, has been employed for the head, instead of the corrosive-sublimate lotion :

℞ Saponis Mollis, ℥ij ;
Olei Juniperi Pyrolignici,
Spiritus Rectificati,
Glycerini, āā ℥iv. M.

¹ Reported by Mr. S. E. Roberts, clinical clerk.

The patient still remains in hospital ; but the appearance of both head and back is eminently satisfactory, while the hair over the former is now appearing in a healthy and vigorous condition. I see no reason to doubt that in this case, as in many previous examples, the recovery will prove complete and lasting.

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