

**HINTS ON THE
HEALTH AND
DISEASE OF THE SKIN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649300112

Hints on the health and disease of the skin by Walter Cooper Dendy

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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WALTER COOPER DENDY

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DISEASE OF THE SKIN**

THE SKIN is of vital importance to the health of the body.

Beauty of complexion is a natural object of solicitude.

Severe or unsightly disease is a source of constant and irrepressible anxiety.

With these truths before us, whence arises the prevalent inattention to the welfare and integrity of this important covering?

The answer will be, the erroneous notions regarding its diseases, and the fascination of those slavish indulgences which minister to their establishment.

To expose, I hope to amend, these errors, the following remarks are written.

Tillotson-place, Waterloo Bridge.

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HINTS ON THE SKIN.

SIMPLE as it appears, the skin is a tissue of very complex structure, composed of four distinct layers. It is supplied with nerves of extreme sensibility, spread like a network over the whole body, and constituting the organ of touch, or that delicate sense of feeling, which ministers to our agreeable sensations, and acts as our sentinel and mentor; and with *pores*, by which atmospheric or other fluids applied to its surface may be absorbed, and contribute to the nutrition of the body, or by which the superfluous fluids, or those which might injure by their retention, are discharged by perspiration. The skin is also furnished with *glands*, which, by secreting an oily fluid, render the tissues flexible, and defend them from the effects of friction; with *bulbs*, in which grow down and hair; with *nails*; and with *blood vessels* the most minute and delicate, which preserve its vitality and contribute its various secretions. The skin is thus composed of *papillæ*, *perspiratory pores*, *absorbent pores*, *fat glands*, *arteries*, and *veins*, with hair

and nail *bulbs*, and colouring glands. Such is the complexity of this apparently simple tissue, which contributes to so many important and vital processes, and, like a shield, defends the body from external influences which might derange and destroy its several parts; preserving its elasticity and moisture, somewhat as the rind of a lemon preserves the pulp from shrivelling and decay.

The superficial extent of the skin of an adult is about fifteen square feet, and the quantity of fluid which oozes through its pores is probably about two pounds in twenty-four hours. When we reflect on the immense load of fluid of which the blood is thus relieved, and its constant oozing in a state of health, we perceive how vitally important is this process of *perspiration* to the welfare of the body—

“ That full and free,
Th’ evaporation through the softened skin
May bear proportion to the swelling blood.”

Its *temporary* suppression is often followed by the most dangerous consequences, especially to the lungs and kidneys, and other organs: and we may easily anticipate the aggravation of evils, direct and indirect, by the more *permanent* alteration of its structure—the protracted diseases of the skin.

Different parts of the body are characterized by peculiar diseases. Rashes, pimples, bladders, pustules, crusts, and scales, have their different seats.

Some have more than one, as small-pox ; and when this *dips beneath* the skin, *pitting* is the result.

But skin diseases are constantly prone to run into each other ; and some, especially those of an inflammatory nature, very closely resemble each other.

There are, however, in all, distinguishing marks. Thus rose rash and red gum will often be mistaken for light measles or scarlatina, but they are not marked by flushed or red eyes, irritation of the nose, and fever, as measles will be ; or by the sore-throat, the *strawberry tongue*, and the head-ache or delirium of scarlatina. The milk crust of children is *not contagious*, yet it is often scarcely distinguished from scald head, which *is* so. Very innocent vesicles, as well as the rank red gum of infants, are often mistaken, and erroneously treated, for the different species of itch, which is infectious, and the effect of a burrowing insect : severe chicken-pock for small-pox ; and the mere scurfiness of the head for ringworm ; while the terms *scrofula* and *scurvy* are often indiscriminately employed to designate almost all the maladies of the skin.

It is clear, therefore, that early discrimination regarding both the nature and the causes of skin diseases is most important, involving often the secret of success.

Some diseases are the effect of simple *external* injuries, as cold and sharp air, which acts by obstructing the circulation of the blood in the skin ; of contusions and wounds ; of the contact of fumes and

vapours; or of irritating articles employed as remedies, or in trade, as among bakers and grocers especially.

Others arise from *specific contagion*, as ringworm, cowpock, itch, &c. : others, both from contagion and the breathing of infected air or vapour, as small-pox and plague : others from infected air only, as measles and scarlatina.

Novel or crude or stimulant articles of diet are a fertile source of cutaneous disease ; both those *generally* hurtful, and those *specifically* disagreeing with the stomach, as shell-fish and various acids, which, acting as poisons, produce an eruption of nettle rash, rose rash, erysipelas, according to the peculiar nature of the constitution.

In some persons, after violent exercise, draughts of cold water will produce various eruptions that have been termed a surfeit.

The functions of the stomach and bowels, it must be remembered, may be severely and permanently affected by emotions of the mind : if such be protracted, all the sympathetic diseases of the skin may, indirectly, have their spring in *moral* influence.

Periods of life are characterized by peculiar forms of disease : some occur chiefly during adolescence, usually subsiding when the transition from youth to adult age is accomplished.

The constitution of climate or of season may also influence the form of disease, and to some certain districts certain disorders are peculiar ; occasionally, indeed, confined to one spot.

THE HEALTH OF THE SKIN.

To *preserve* the health of the skin, to prevent its disease, the most effective modes are, the regulation of the functions of the bowels, and of diet, due exercise, and the bath.

The employment of *APERIENTS* for the regulation of the bowels is of course most important in the preservation of the health of the skin, so intimately sympathizing as it is with the *alimentary canal*. It is difficult, however, to prescribe a set form for all, as constitutions and the degrees of strength, as well as the character of diseases, so constantly vary. In languid systems, and weak stomachs, the waters of Seidlitz, or Seltzer, or of Cheltenham, Hockley, Streatham, or Beulah, will be often sufficient; or two or three drachms of the tartrate of potass, adding to these a tea-spoonful of syrup of ginger and of dill water. Even one or two dessert-spoonfuls of common sweet oil eaten with salad will be often efficacious. When the system is robust and plethoric, more powerful purgatives should be employed, as colocynth, salts, and senna. If the liver be *torpid*, as indicated by loss of appetite, heartburn, indigestion, pain in the right side, symptoms usually termed *bilious*, from three to five grains of blue pill with ginger may be given once or twice in a week, at night; not exceeding three or four doses.

In many cases it is judicious to blend *opposite* qua-