

**ON SOME DISEASES OF THE
SKIN, WHICH ARE PRODUCED
BY DERANGEMENTS OF THE
NERVOUS SYSTEM**

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On some diseases of the skin, which are produced by derangements of the nervous system by
Thomas Stretch Dowse

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THOMAS STRETCH DOWSE

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PREFACE.

THE following pages have been written to illustrate, in the most simple and practical manner, that many diseases of the skin are really more due to some defect or derangement of the nervous system than to an altered condition of the blood, and that the treatment of these diseases, if it is to be curative, must be directed rather to strengthening the nervous system than to the removal of so-called blood impurities.

THOMAS STRETCH DOWSE.

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March, 1880.

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ON SOME
DISEASES OF THE SKIN,
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DERANGEMENTS OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM.

WERE the nature of nervous affections of the skin and its appendages more clearly understood, we should undoubtedly find less difficulty in applying to them methods of treatment more decisive, and more certainly curative. Modern investigation, indeed, has conclusively proved that a large proportion of skin diseases is due to an exalted or depressed condition of the nerves which govern circulation, secretion, and nutrition; and at the present time it is admitted, that defective treatment is often due to a want of knowledge of the important part played by the nutritive nerves, in these almost universal and troublesome complaints.

Were we asked, what skin diseases were absolutely of nervous origin? we should unhesitatingly reply that the majority was.

When we consider how essentially the skin is connected with the brain and the spinal cord, through the plexiform series of nerve-loops which underlie the skin, and which form a nervous circuit with the various nervous centres, we cannot be at a loss to comprehend how intimate and vital are these associations. The sensibility of the skin to diseased action is demonstrated in many ways, and although we are perfectly justified in ascribing diseases of the skin to gout, scrofula, phthisis, and so on, yet the development of the eruption will frequently be, in *direct proportion and quantity to the stability or instability, and to the vital force, and generative capacity, of the nervous centres*, no less than to the conducting power of the nerves themselves.

The excretory power of the skin, in relieving the body of waste material, is one of nature's processes; and, through the skin, the failure of nerve-power is exemplified in nearly every form of debility and of inflammatory disease.

The best-known example, perhaps, is the *profuse sweating in consumption*, due to the want

of contractile power in the nerves, which are in connection with the sweat-glands.

The skin eruptions which are associated with, and intermittent with, dyspepsia, irregular action of the heart, sleeplessness, giddiness, headache, constipation, furred tongue, weariness, and lassitude, can in a large number of instances, be clearly traced to malaria, over-work, bodily and mental fatigue, anxiety, grief, fits of passion, or exhaustive indiscretions.

In all such cases as these, the nervous system must play a very important part, as well in their production as in their cure. The old-fashioned system of purging, depleting, and starving, in the treatment of such cases, has now, to a great extent, become obsolete; and fortunate it is for our patients that it is so. But, on account of our variable and varying peculiarities of constitution, what is, in reality, a stimulant and tonic form of treatment in one case, will be found in another to be depressing and relaxing; just in the same way that a dose of opium will relieve pain and produce a quiet and refreshing sleep in one patient, whilst in another it will produce the *greatest* distress and excitability.

It is a great misfortune for the true and perfect development of the science and art of healing,

that such anomalies should exist, for they often bring the profession into discredit. It is still more unfortunate, however, when fashion seizes the helm, and directs and controls the method of treating diseases. It must be often surprising, and, in fact, incomprehensible to our patients, to find that the same disease which fashion, some years ago, treated with bleeding, or an immoderate use of alcohol, is now treated by a *milk diet* and *Apollinaris water*. Doubtless, in the majority of cases, success attends either of these modes of treatment, and nothing can demonstrate more clearly and fully, to the thoughtful and reasoning mind, how essentially necessary it is, that the healer of diseases should be guided as little as possible by stereotyped opinions. By this we mean, what fashion dictates, and is considered the guiding or ruling principle of the day. Articles are written and published in the *Contemporary Review*, or in the *Nineteenth Century*, or in some other periodical, by different medical men, it may be on 'Diet,' or on the 'Use and Abuse of Alcohol,' or on some such subject, and it is a great chance if any two writers agree. But medical men are not alone in the matter of inexplicable and contradictory reasoning. Matters, in themselves apparently simple and easy of in-