

**ECZEMA; ITS NATURE AND TREATMENT,
AND INCIDENTALY, THE INFLUENCE OF
CONSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS ON SKIN
DISEASES; BEING THE LETTSOMIAN
LECTURES FOR THE SESSION 1869-70**

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ON SKIN DISEASES.

BEING
THE LETTSOMIAN LECTURES FOR THE SESSION 1869-70.

Delivered before the Medical Society of London.

BY

TILBURY FOX, M.D. LOND. M.R.C.P.

FELLOW OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE;
PHYSICIAN TO THE SKIN DEPARTMENT OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE HOSPITAL.



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PREFACE.



THE following observations on the nature and treatment of Eczema, which formed the Lettsomian Course of Lectures delivered before the Medical Society of London in the early part of the present year, were published, in great part, subsequently, in the *Lancet*, but are now printed in a separate form, in obedience to a wish to that effect expressed by many of my professional *confrères*. In choosing Eczema—the commonest disease of the skin—as the subject of my Lectures, *and in deciding as to the particular mode in which I have dealt with it*, I had regard particularly to the example set me by most of my predecessors, who have selected for the Lettsomian course, with eminent success, some topic of immediate interest to the busy practitioner.

A consideration of the mode in which Eczema has been hitherto studied and analyzed by observers exhibits in a forcible way the partial and incomplete manner in which Dermatologists are wont to investigate cutaneous maladies; thus an opening is afforded me of specially calling attention to this point in relation to “Modern Dermatology,” which is the title of an introductory chapter to the following Lectures.

43, SACKVILLE STREET, Piccadilly, W.

May, 1870.



INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

MODERN DERMATOLOGY.

WE have heard of late, and are likely still to hear, much about "Modern Dermatology." Amid the mass of wordiness in which it abounds there is certainly enough to give solid satisfaction to the practitioner. The various Medical Schools have recognized the necessity of affording students larger opportunities of observing and studying skin affections; an increasing number of investigators are just now busily at work, both clinically and pathologically, in this particular branch of medicine in all parts of the world; and one of the most influential corporations has worthily taken Dermatology under its protection, and founded—thanks to the liberality of Mr. Erasmus Wilson, F.R.S., to whose labours in this particular department of medicine I have often acknowledged my indebtedness—a special professoriate for the dispensation of sounder teaching on the subject. As the result of this activity, there is the promise that Dermatology will be placed upon a more distinctly scientific basis, and of our receiving larger and sounder views of the causation, pathology, and treatment of cutaneous mischiefs. I cannot but express a hope that the profession will actively aid in securing this end by resolutely setting its face against those who deal with the subject in any but the most scientific spirit, or who practise Dermatology but with a high regard to the important problems which it

presents for elucidation, and the solution of which must throw great light upon dubious questions in general pathology.

I have always desired to be the student's friend in regard to Dermatology. I would therefore point out that there are one or two most unnecessary obstacles thrown in the way of his attempt to master the subject, whilst there are, as I think, very pernicious methods of observing and describing cutaneous diseases that make this an especial difficulty for him. I have attempted to avoid these faulty methods, and to illustrate their evil influence, in dealing with the subject of Eczema in the following Lectures. I will here merely indicate them in general terms.

First.—The tendency to introduce new names is most puzzling, and the practice of reapplying old terms in novel ways sadly confusing.

Secondly.—A bad practice exists of regarding skin diseases in a piecemeal manner, and not in their entirety. These diseases consist of certain stages, and mere stages are often made to take the position of *varieties*. I have specially dealt with this point in the following pages.

Thirdly.—Accidental features are often regarded not only as sufficient to constitute varieties of diseases, but to warrant the use of distinct appellations. For instance, œdema is an accidental feature of many skin mischiefs, in which congestion plays a part, as in eczema, yet its presence gives rise to the foundation of œdematous varieties, as in eczema œdematosum, erysipelas œdematodes, &c. The necessity for closely distinguishing between accidentals and essentials is very well evidenced in the case of so-called "prurigo." The modern view is that all the changes comprehended under the term prurigo are due to pediculi; that every man who has "prurigo" is "lousy," a doctrine editorially sanctioned very recently in the *British Medical Journal*,—utterly untenable, clinically untrue, and, because repulsive, all the more desirable to abandon. The only characteristic to which pediculi give rise is a certain wound called a bite

—a flat hæmorrhage speck with its central lesion. Beyond producing this, pediculi merely act as ordinary local irritants; they irritate and give rise to scratching, which induces eruptive phenomena—accidental phenomena these are—of the most varied kind in unhealthy skins; this is the case with local irritants generally. Such is pediculosis, phtheiriasis, or lousiness. But pediculi may be found in connection with an atrophied skin—flabby, inelastic, pigmented, itchy, and the seat of a pruriginous eruption—in old people: this is very common in hospital practice amongst the poor, the ill-fed, and the uncleanly. In these cases the pathognomonic sign of the presence of pediculi is present, but the total disease is a mixed affair; viz., pediculosis *plus* atrophy of the skin and its results. But further, true prurigo, that is, a badly-nourished skin (atrophy), with related perverted innervation and “pruriginous” eruption—the essentials of prurigo—may exist without the vestige of a pediculus, as is usually the case amongst the better and more cleanly classes. “Prurigo” may be accidental to pediculosis, and *vice versa*.

Fourthly.—Similar as regards naked-eye appearances, are often regarded as identicals. In some cases of lupus the formation of epithelium is only disturbed, not destroyed, so that a scaliness is produced. This has been regarded as psoriasis; hence the term lupus-psoriasis, which signifies an improbable disease; for it supposes that two essentially different processes are at work in the same spot—the formation of a fibro-plastic neoplasm and the hypertrophic growth of the cell-elements of the rete mucosum.

So much for four bad habits of dermatologists. I merely add that we need especially at the present time to remember, in relation to Dermatology, that:—

1. The tendency of modern research is to show that many cutaneous diseases, supposed to be dependent upon “morbid conditions of the blood,” originate in the skin itself, in disorders of its cell- or its nerve-elements.

2. Blood alterations are nevertheless very closely connected with cutaneous diseases. A distinction is to be