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WHAT IS URÆMIA?

Paper read at the Regular Meeting of the Toronto Medical Society, February 19th, 1889.

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FROM an etymological point of view this question is easily answered; the word simply denotes an abnormal amount of urea in the blood, and was the name given to a certain group of pathological phenomena by those (1) who first considered them to be due to such an altered condition of this important fluid. The correctness of this original view I shall discuss later on.

In a well known text-book it is defined as "*The accumulation in the blood of excrementitious substances in the urine, and is a term usually applied to a group of symptoms which appear when the function of the kidneys is interrupted or much impaired*" (2). Dr. W. Carter, of Liverpool, in his Bradshawe Lecture, delivered before the Royal College of Physicians, London, in August, 1888, says, "*Uræmia may be defined as the altered condition of health caused by the accumulation within the body of poisonous products that should be eliminated by the kidneys.*" (3).

Common to the diffuse, non-suppurative affections of the kidneys, which are collectively

known as Bright's Disease, are certain clinical symptoms, which appear in a degree more or less marked in all the forms. These are: albuminuria, tube-casts, cardiac and vascular changes, hemorrhages, dropsy, secondary inflammatory lesions, retinitis and optic neuritis, and, lastly, uræmia; which is, therefore, not a disease in itself, but only a symptom or group of symptoms, the origin and causation of which I propose to examine into with some degree of minuteness.

It is quite evident that this subject admits of a very natural division into two distinct parts, and may be discussed under the two heads of *clinical characters* and *pathogenesis*.

CLINICAL CHARACTERS.

Under this head I shall be very brief, as this paper is mainly concerned with the second part of the subject. Among uræmic symptoms are included very different functional disorders of the nervous system, which manifest themselves in varying combinations, and most of which are doubtless of cerebral origin. Accompanying that form of Bright's Disease known as parenchymatous nephritis, especially in its acute stage, are certain nervous symptoms which we may call those of *acute uræmia*. The most common of these are sudden attacks precisely like those of epilepsy, which may be the first indication to the patient that there is anything wrong; or there may be prodromal symptoms preceding the epileptiform seizure by a few hours or days, such as vertigo, drowsiness, headache, ill-defined pains in the limbs, more or less rigidity of cer-

(1). Piorry, Willis.

(2). FLINT. Practice of Medicine, 5th Ed., p. 76.

(3). British Medical Journal, Sept. 1, 1888, p. 463.