

B. Hydrag. chlor. mite, gr. x-xxx ;  
Ung. zinci oxidi; ʒ i.—M.

Ointments of ammoniated mercury, and, in the more chronic forms of the disease, of the red oxide of mercury, may also at times be employed with advantage.

Eczema of the palms is usually of a chronic character, and the treatment quite different from that which has been described as appropriate to the disease as found on the backs of the hands or on the fingers. The disease is not likely to be mistaken for any other affection except the palmar syphiloderm. This, however, it does closely resemble in many instances. When signs of syphilitic disease exist elsewhere, or when the eruption runs up from the palm towards the wrist, some characteristic features of syphilis are apt to present themselves, so as to render the character of the palmar trouble unmistakable. But when we are forced to form an opinion from the eruption on the palm alone, this is sometimes quite difficult. Usually the lesion of eczema are characterized by diffuse irregular patches of thickened epidermis, with fissures here and there and jagged outlines. The syphilitic eruption, on the other hand, is characterized by deeper infiltration, with less epithelial thickening and scaliness. Moreover, the lesions, if carefully examined, will almost always be found made up of rounded patches, single or coalesced. It is, in fact, a papular eruption concealed by the thickness of the epiderm. Itching may or may not be present in either case, and I do not know what other sign can be given as distinctive of the two affections when the palm alone is affected. Proper treatment quickly affects the syphilitic affection, while eczema of the palm is terribly intractable.

The diagnosis being made, however, we must remember that when eczema of the hands presents itself in the chronic forms so often met with, the treatment given as suitable for the acute and sub-acute varieties is useless and quite out of place. The remedies here required are, first, such as will soften and remove the redundant epidermis, and, second, those calculated to remove the infiltration of the cutaneous tissues.

Among the former, maceration by hot water applications, and by rubber bandages and gloves, may be mentioned. The hands, or the palms alone, if these are the parts chiefly affected, may be soaked in water as hot as can be borne for some minutes before the stimulant applications to be described are applied. This softens the horny outside layers of the skin, and renders them infinitely more penetrable to various agents than they would otherwise be.

Rubber bandages and especially rubber gloves, are to be highly recommended for the same purpose. They should be worn continuously for some days, being turned inside out and cleansed with cold water every day, while the hands are wiped on a dry towel. Under the use of the rubber, eczematous hands covered with horny epidermis

become softened so as to permit the employment of ointments, which would be perfectly useless were they applied prematurely. The rubber applications themselves are only rarely curative. Though the disease may seem at times to have been entirely removed by their use, it quickly returns when they are removed. If it is borne in mind that the rubber applications are only preparative in their action, much disappointment will be avoided.

Alkalies in various forms are very efficient agents in macerating the epidermis. The saponis viridis, or "Hebra's green soap," a soft soap containing an excess of potash, is a very good preparatory application. It may be rubbed into the indurated patches with a bit of flannel, with the addition of a few drops of water, or it may in some cases be applied in the form of a poultice spread thinly on rags, and kept in position until the epidermis becomes softened. Sometimes solutions of potassa—ten to thirty grains to the ounce—may be used with good effect. If the weaker solution is employed, the patient himself may apply it with the aid of a rag or a stick, rubbing the solution into the affected parts until a feeling of warmth is produced, and then washing it off with pure water. The stronger solution should be employed by the physician himself, and a good deal of friction may be used, care being taken to confine the action of the remedy to the indurated tissues. What is wanted is to soften the hard tissues; and the effect of the potassa may be heightened if the part affected is soaked for a little time in hot water to soften the tissues. The potassa then takes hold more rapidly.

Recently I have been using a solution of papain, a substance which exercises a sort of digestive influence on the epidermis, and which has served a good purpose in some cases of horny, indurated palmar eczema by preparing the way for other remedies. The following formula may be employed:

B Papain, gr. xii ;  
Pulv. sodii bi-borat., gr. v ;  
Aqua, ʒ ij.—M.

Paint on the part twice daily.

Having softened as far as possible the induration and callousness which are characteristic of chronic eczema of the palm, further applications may be made. Of those apt to be of use, the tarry and mercurial preparations are prominent. Tar ointments of various strength, containing from one drachm of tar to the ounce up to the official tar ointment of the Pharmacopœia, may be employed. Solutions containing tar, as the "Liquor picis alkalinus,"—

B Picis liquidæ,  
Potassæ causticæ, a a ʒ i ;  
Aqua ad ʒ i.—M.,—

or the preparation known as "Liquor carbonis detergens," may be used in a diluted form, say beginning at one part to four of water, and gradually increasing the strength.