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Selections: Medicine.

SOME POINTS IN THE PATHOLOGY OF TUBERCLE.

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Read at the Meeting of the Pathological Society of Philadelphia, April 22, 1880.

In attempting to put together some thoughts on the pathology of tubercle, it will be necessary, however briefly, to refer to the unsettled state of the question in the best medical minds of the day. Immediately following Laennec, nothing could have appeared more firmly fixed than the doctrine he so clearly enunciated. It was impossible to doubt tuberculosis as a specific disease. To have misgivings as to the nature of consumption and its constant association with tubercular destruction was to appear to return to barbaric darkness. Not to separate with clearness the different forms of tubercle was to forfeit all claim to be a pathologist. But we all know what has recently happened. The German iconoclast has been at work. Nobody likes to speak now of tubercular diathesis, tubercle being a constitutional affection. It is for the most part, simply the result of a local inflammation; and cheesy matter, infective process from absorption, irritation in structures bounding in lymphatic tissues, are the common phrases of the day, which satisfy most much now as diathesis, constitutional condition, specific deposit, satisfied most not many years since.

And the local view, if such it may be called, once adopted, has brought with it scores of interesting observations on the inoculation of tubercle; its artificial causation; its production in the lung by inhalation of both tubercular

and non-tubercular substances,—observations which are warmly discussed, criticized, adopted, rejected, explained, explained away, and the uncertainties connected with which, quite apart from the other difficulties of the subject, are the cause mainly of the generally disturbed condition of the whole inquiry.

Underlying these observations, or at least closely connected with them, lies the vital question, What relation does tubercle bear to the inflammation? And it is this question particularly that I desire to examine with you a little more fully to-night, and concerning which I shall venture to offer the result of some researches and reflections.

As a necessary introduction, I shall have to examine the evidence on which we pronounce a mass to be tubercular; in other words, what its minute structure as shown by the microscope is. And, to avoid any confusion at the threshold of our inquiry, let me speak of that which we find in undoubted tubercle,—in the little, hard, military bodies, which may afterwards become aggregated into larger gray masses. In them we encounter three elements:

Medium-sized, rather shrivelled cells, not very regular in outline, consisting of finely-granular, dense material, with a nucleus small in proportion to the cells, or with several nuclei of similar character. They were once regarded as significant of tubercle, but are now supposed to be swollen epithelial cells which have undergone retrograde metamorphosis. Mixed up with them are cells less dense and like ordinary epithelium, small cells like leucocytes, and a great deal of granular material of doubtful origin.

Giant cells. These consist of large, many-nucleated cells, which are found at rather an