

PAPER ON SCURVY.

By DR. DONNET AND DR. FRASER.

IN the following paper on Scurvy, drawn up at the request of the Committee, we have endeavoured, with as much brevity as is consistent with the object in view, "to bring to their Lordships' notice (1) the prevailing view of the Medical Profession in regard to this disease, (2) some exceptional cases of immunity from scurvy deserving of further investigation, (3) together with such suggestions in regard to the prevention and treatment of the disease, the use of lime juice and other antiscorbutics, which the professional evidence tendered to the Committee has led us "to consider may prove of general interest." We have also ventured, in connection with the first subdivision of our subject, to allude to some of the more salient points of the outbreak of scurvy in the recent expedition, in order to show in what respects this outbreak, in its history, and more especially in its causation, may be considered to harmonize with the prevailing views of the Medical Profession regarding this disease.

I. SYMPTOMS, PATHOLOGY, AND CAUSES.

The evidence given to the Committee has reference to scurvy, not only as it appeared in the Arctic Regions, but likewise in Africa, Asia Minor, the Crimea, India, Australia, and various parts of the United Kingdom. In every place where observed, the distinctive characters of scurvy were unchanged. Instances also have been given in evidence which prove that the disease is not confined to the White Race, but is met with in the Negro, the Lascar, the Indian, and the Esquimaux, and presents the same essential characters in all races.

Symptoms.—The symptoms which are observed in the course of scurvy, and which characterise the disease, are shown in evidence to be as follows:—The colour of the face changes, the skin grows sallow and assumes a leaden hue, and the countenance may afterwards become bloated, and the eye assume a heavy expression. A general debility prevails, and an apathy of manner is noticed; there is feebleness of the knees and ankles, and pains—resembling the flying pains of rheumatism—attack various parts of the body. Swelling of the joints, with rigidity, accompany these symptoms. This rigidity is especially observed in the ham, for which site a predilection seems to exist in the case of men engaged in walking exercise. The gums swell, grow spongy, and bleed from the slightest cause. The breath becomes fetid. The skin is dry and rough; and petechiæ are observed about the legs and thighs, as small reddish brown specks at the points where the roots of the hair perforate the skin. Sleep at this period of the disease is readily obtained; the appetite usually remains good; there is some constipation, but no fever. Sometimes, there is breathlessness with sense of tightness of the chest, for which auscultation generally fails to reveal a cause. Night blindness has sometimes been observed as a symptom of scurvy.

With the advance of the disease the symptoms become aggravated, the petechiæ extend, coalesce, and assume the form of large maculated patches; the skin loses its elasticity, readily pits and frequently breaks, and the ulcer which follows assumes a spongy appearance, and resembles what sailors graphically term "bullock's liver." The smell from this ulcer is offensive.

The low spirits become confirmed, and the unfortunate patient indulges in the gloomiest of ideas; the fetor of the breath is now intolerable; the gums protrude as spongy masses* from the mouth; the teeth become loose in the socket, and frequently fall out.

In this advanced condition, every slight scratch degenerates into an ulcer, old scars break out afresh, and hæmorrhages are now frequent from different parts of the body

* It is to these spongy masses that Jean, Sire de Joinville, in his "Histoire de St. Louis," alludes in the following passage:—

"La maladie commençoit à engreger en l'ost en tel manière, que il venoit tant de char morte es gencives à nostre gent, que il convenoit que barbers otassent la char morte, pource que il peussent la viande maschier et avaler aval. Grant pitié estoit d'oir brèrè les gens parmi l'ost, ausquels l'en copoit la char morte; car il brécient aussi comme femmes qui travaillent d'enfant."—(The disease increased in our camp to such a degree as to cause large masses of dead flesh to spring from the gums of our people. The barbers were forced to cut away the dead flesh to enable the patients to eat. It was pitiful to hear the cries of those on whom this operation was performing; for they cried like women in labour.)