

# MEDICAL SCIENCE

VIDEO MELIORA PROBOQUE

EDITORS

P. H. BRYCE, M.A., M.B., L.R.C.P. & S., EDIN.  
WILLIAM NATTRESS, M.D., M.R.C.S., ENG.

P. J. STRATHY, M.D., M.R.C.S., ENG.  
W. B. NESBITT, B.A., M.D., C.M.

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS, EXCHANGES, ETC., TO DR. W. B. NESBITT, COR. COLLEGE & McCAUL STS., TORONTO

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

### ECZEMA.

BY P. H. BRYCE, M.A., M.B., READ BEFORE TORONTO MEDICAL SOCIETY, APRIL 26TH.

SAYS Erasmus Wilson, "Eczema is neither specific in nature or in its cause." "It is hereditary only in the sense of the transmission of natural tendencies from parent to offspring, and not by virtue of any special virus or *causa morbi*." So impressed have we become with the truth contained in the above quotations, that we cannot forego the prompting to make them, in some sense, pegs, upon which to hang some arguments.

If our early clinical teachers had left us no other legacy, we would still have owed them a large debt of gratitude for the skill with which they tacked on a distinctive classical termination to every sign of the disease under observation. Nowhere have we got this dictionary of terms more graphically set forth than in the names which have been given to the varieties of eczema, from *E. erythematosum* to *E. hypertrophicum*; and never possibly a better illustration of the quotation, "That things are not always what they seem."

To the physician, who, in general practice, finds himself frequently called upon to relieve this distressing malady, must have frequently come the question, "What is it?" While we feel that Dr. Wilson's definition is most comprehensive and valuable, we must nevertheless confess that it is so general as to be, in some measure, lacking in specific statements of the phenomena of the disease. If, however, it should aid us in keeping the fact distinctly before us, that eczema has not a specific cause, but is the sign of a tendency, or tendencies, it will be of the greatest service in practice, since it will enable us to seek for and treat the internal condition rather than the outward signs. In a re-

cently-published article in the *Journal of Mental Science* &c. "The Hereditary Neuropathic Diathesis," were discussed some results of hereditary tendencies, taking the form of neuroses, or, as in eye diseases, of imperfect structural development; and the illustration of the differences as seen in the so-called temperaments, bilious, sanguine, etc., in the outward appearances of the skin, as regards color; circulation of blood in it, etc., are illustrative of varieties which doubtless may exist in the different internal organs of the body. Certain it is, at any rate, that we have constitutions which are related as genera, and species, and varieties, ending in the individual with peculiarities distinguishing him from all others.

Thus Frederick Roberts in speaking of lymphangectasis says, after speaking of the hypertrophy of different lymphatic trunks: "With regard to the causes of this condition it is often congenital, and has been attributed to a want of specialization in the lymphatic system of certain parts."

Formad has further pointed that in the scrofulous diathesis cellular tissue is marked by an unusual wideness of the lymphatic spaces and the structural development of surrounding cellular tissue. Similarly, we doubt not, were physical diagnosis sufficiently refined we might be able to recognize marked variations in structural conditions of nerve tissue, explaining their constantly varying influences and effects upon assimilation, nutrition, and excretion.

From these facts as a starting point, and knowing from physical experiment, as well as clinical experience, the peculiar and special influences exerted by the nervous system, and notably the vaso-motor, over the circulation, it is not difficult for us to understand how some one of several