

THE
CANADIAN PRACTITIONER

FORMERLY "THE CANADIAN JOURNAL OF MEDICAL SCIENCE."

EDITOR:

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Business Management,

THE J. E. BRYANT COMPANY (Limited), 58 Bay Street.

TORONTO, JUNE 16, 1890.

Original Communications.

INFANTILE PARALYSIS.*

BY BERTRAM SPENCER, M.D., M.R.C.S.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen:

The subject of my paper for this evening has been selected, not for the purpose of propounding any new theories, nor any new plan of treatment of my own, but from the fact that one or two cases, that I have lately seen, have been of interest to me, and in the hope that any discussion on the subject may elicit from those present some light on the pathology and treatment, and more especially the treatment in the later stages of this rather unsatisfactory disorder.

Infantile paralysis; essential paralysis of children is an older and more senseless term; spinal paralysis of children; acute polio-myelitis of children, are some of the names given to this disease by various authors, which was first accurately described by Heine, a German observer, in 1840. He was the first to express the opinion that disease of the spinal cord was the chief factor in this paralysis, which opinion was confirmed later by Prevost, Vulpian, Charcot, and others, by the demonstration of actual pathological changes in the spinal cords of those suffering from this disorder.

This paralysis, as the name indicates, occurs almost altogether in children, during the earlier years and while dentition is in progress; though

I myself have not seen, nor have I been able to find recorded, a single case where dentition alone might fairly be claimed to have been the cause of an attack.

Exposure to cold also is frequently accredited with the onset of this paralysis, and probably with more fairness than the cause I have just cited.

Bristowe says: "Its causes are obscure; it seems, however, neither to be hereditary, nor to be dependent in any degree on privation or other conditions associated with poverty. Dentition would appear to be largely concerned in its causation, and it has often been observed to follow on measles, gastric fever, and other febrile maladies."

Exposure to cold and damp is undoubtedly a common cause of the disease. Beard, Rockwell, Eustace Smith, Gowers, and others, also quote cases in which exposure to cold appears undoubtedly to have been the exciting cause.

Strümpell, on the other hand, says: "An exciting cause, like taking cold, has hardly ever been made out. The children are almost always perfectly healthy previously, and come of healthy families without any neuropathic predisposition. The whole course of the disease makes the hypothesis very probable that we have to do with an acute infectious disease—with an infectious process, which first causes a general infection of the body, and then is localised chiefly in a circumscribed portion of the spinal cord. It also, perhaps, bears some relation to the nature of the disease as just signi-

* Read before the Toronto Medical Society.