

## ON THE DIARRHŒA OF INFANTS.

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It is unnecessary that I should offer any definition of the term "*Diarrhœa*," a disease which I suppose to be coeval with the history of our first parents; nor do I propose to dwell at any length on its numerous varieties, which are distinctly described in all the standard authorities in medicine of the present day. The feculent, the bilious, the mucous, the serous, the chylous, and other species of *Diarrhœa*, are respectively attributed to different agencies, and each of them seems to demand a different mode of treatment. I shall confine myself, on the present occasion, to that *general* form arising principally from the irritation produced by dentition, and into which one or other of the varieties I have just mentioned is found most commonly to enter. For the sake of perspicuity I shall notice it:—

1st. In its history, general and pathological.

2nd. In the treatment which, so far as my observation has extended, it is desirable to pursue.

The amount of deaths, from this and from other diseases, occurring at the period of dentition, is greater than I feel warranted in stating in precise terms. Dr. Arbuthnot estimated it to be one in every ten, and other authors one in every six. Whether these computations have been founded on correct data or otherwise, I do not venture to say, but admitting that they have exceeded the reality, we cannot close our eyes to the truth, which stands out in bold relief, that the mortality, at this critical period, is exceedingly great.

I am disposed to consider this malady as being possessed of a two-fold nature, although in giving expression to this opinion I may be exposed, perhaps, in some degree, to the charge of admitting a paradox. But if I should say it is *Idiopathic*, it would involve a conclusion manifestly erroneous,—if it is pronounced *Symptomatic*, it would not comprehend all the circumstances converging to its production. I deem it, therefore, to be constituted of *both*, and believe it to arise *idiopathically* from the action of a hot sun on the hepatic system, and *symptomatically* from the irritation of dentition. I am supported in this opinion by the fact, that *infants under the age of six months are much less subject to Diarrhœa*,

notwithstanding the influence adverted to, and that when it *does* occur, it assumes, in most instances, a form which is very readily under the control of treatment. Again, in the absence of this influence, the act of teething, considered simply in itself, is not so frequently productive of the disease under consideration, a proof of which is exhibited in the *cessation of the symptoms on the approach of cold weather, although the process of dentition continues to go forward with undiminished activity*. These circumstances have led me to the obvious and irresistible conclusion, that a primary cause, as well as one arising from sympathy, *generally* concurs to establish (at least in our Canadian climate) the obstinate *Diarrhœa* with which this feeble class of patients have so often to contend.

It must have been observed that, under ordinary circumstances; it makes its approach with insidious steps: the dejections are rather more frequent than they ought to be, but as they present a natural appearance, it excites but little attention, and it is permitted, perhaps, to continue for some days, and gradually to increase before medical aid is solicited. Even now that aid would not be sought were it not for the more prominent co-existing circumstances of irritability of the stomach, and constant restlessness of temper. The absence of pain on pressure, of pyrexia, and of morbid redness of the tongue, give satisfactory evidence, that in this stage of the disease it cannot be regarded as of a truly inflammatory character. There is merely a degree of irritability in the mucous membrane, occasioned by an increased secretion of bile, evidenced by the bright green evacuations. But this irritability, from the continued operation of the same causes, in process of time, produces alteration in the pathological condition of the lining membrane, and some degree of inflammatory action ensues.

It is very difficult, in the *early* stages of *Diarrhœa*, to ascertain the precise nature of the morbid appearances. I must own that I have never had the opportunity of being present at such an examination, and I believe that the opportunities must be rare. Dr. Crampton observes, that "the membrane, in recent cases, has been observed more or less red and congested, or extremely pale and anæmic; the redness being disposed in patches or in continuous stripes, leaving the intervening portions very