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Selections: Medicine.

INFANTILE PARALYSIS; THE CLINICAL HISTORY OF CASES WITH RIGID, AND THOSE WITH FLACCID, MUSCLES.*

BY WM. ADAMS, F.R.C.S.

Under the term "infantile paralysis," two very different classes of cases are included, in both of which there is partial or complete loss of voluntary control over the limbs affected.

The two classes of cases are characterized by the condition of the muscles. In the one class the muscles are rigid, and in the other they are flaccid; and these two classes of cases present many differences in their clinical history, their pathology, and the results of treatment.

Cases of the First Class, with rigid muscles, are sometimes congenital; they occur in connexion with protracted and difficult labour, the children being born asphyxiated, and often thought to be dead; livid in colour, and not crying, or breathing for some time. It is often several hours before the medical attendant thinks the child will live, and then some convulsive seizure frequently occurs.

The cerebral congestion appears to lead to subacute inflammation of the arachnoid at the base of the brain and upper part of the spinal cord; and in the more severe cases, in which the mental powers of the patient are damaged, the substance of the brain is no doubt also the seat of inflammatory changes.

* Read at the Medical Society of London, November 19, 1877.

Clinical History.—In the course of some months after birth, in the class of cases above referred to, with rigid muscles, various defects are observed, in proportion to the extent and severity of the mischief. In many cases, only a little stiffness in both legs is observed by the nurse, who finds she cannot separate them during the washing process as widely as in other children. In other cases there is a more general affection of the muscles of both legs, so that a tendency to contraction exists in all the joints, and the child is unable to stand.

In still more severe cases, one or both arms are affected in addition to the legs, the muscles being rigid and contracted. Strabismus also occurs, and the children articulate very imperfectly, and sometimes dribble; it is in fact a general affection of all the voluntary muscles, and in these severe cases the mental faculties are more or less interfered with and weakened, the children having an idiotic appearance.

Similar cases, but generally in a less severe form, frequently occur between the ages of six and eighteen months, during the period of dentition, and are sometimes ushered in by convulsive affections; and also at a later period of infancy, during the second dentition, or as the result of some febrile condition. In all these cases fewer muscles are involved, frequently only those of one leg and one arm, or of both legs; the intellect is but rarely affected.

In some cases neither dentition nor any febrile attack precedes the paralytic seizure, and in the absence of any cause being assigned by the parents, a fall or injury is suspected, or some accident may even have been known to occur, and by this the surgeon or physician