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## Selections: Medicine.

### DIARRHŒA AND ATHREPSIC ERYTHEMA OF THE NEWLY-BORN.

(PARROT.)

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The diarrhœa of young children and especially of the newly-born, to which we are exclusively directing attention, is not a disease, it is not an affection, for it cannot be connected with any fixed organic condition: it corresponds to very different modalities of the digestive functions, and is met with in very different lesions of the intestinal tube. We cannot absolutely look upon it as a disease; it is only a symptom, only a clinical fact which is observed by the bedside of children, and we will study it only in this point of view, entirely limiting this lecture to the diarrhœa of the newly-born, in no wise wishing to write a chapter on general pathology, and reserving our study to the diarrhœa of very young children and especially of the newly-born. We will then limit our study to a practical point of view, and consider diarrhœa only at the age at which we are observing it, that is to say in the three first months of extra uterine life.

Let us begin our study with that of normal intestinal dejections. In the little new-born child, immediately after birth, we find first a very peculiar special excrementitious product, meconium (from the Greek *μυκωνιον*, poppy juice, to which it bears a certain analogy). Meconium exists after the end of the third month of uterine life, but at that time it presents a different aspect. It is only at the fifth

month that it takes all the characters which we find in it at birth. During the three days which follow the birth, the child passes some meconium. It has the appearance of an unctuous, pasty, pitchy matter, coming out in the form of a small pudding, spreading over the buttocks, and on the sheet, and intimately adhering to it like pitch, and when we remove the coverings from the little child we separate them only with difficulty. The meconium itself stretches like an elastic band, before separating from them.

It presents a very dark green tint, sometimes blackish. It contains no solid matters. To the touch as to the sight it is a soft and unctuous substance. It rarely persists beyond two or three days. Towards the end it is already mixed with a clearer yellow matter, and less unctuous to the touch: the meconium is about to finish.

As to its constitution: it contains more than 700 parts to 1,000 of water, and an enormous quantity of mucus and epithelium from the stomach and especially from the intestinal tube, which appears to be the first body which constitutes the meconium. This epithelial waste would irritate the surface of the intestine and would provoke afterwards an exaggerated secretion of bile, which, in fact, exists there in large quantity, likewise well marked by its colouring matters and biliary acids. Salts in quite large quantity are also found.

We may here be asked, how it is that meconium is accumulated thus from the third month without being eliminated into the amniotic waters. Now it cannot get out of the intestine, because, to expel fecal matters a certain effort is necessary, and for this effort