

THE ETIOLOGY OF ECZEMA.

There are two theories regarding the origin of eczema. According to one, eczema is microbic in origin; and to the other, amicrobic.

THE MICROBIC THEORY OF THE ORIGIN OF ECZEMA.

According to this theory, eczema is an infectious inflammation of the skin.

Among those who have strongly supported the microbic theory are Bockhart and Unna. Bockhart, experimenting with virulent staphylococci aureus and albus, found that an inoculation of the skin with a filtrate of a culture produced a papulo-vesicular eruption having the gross and microscopical appearance of an eczema. Bockhart's observation was confirmed by Bender and Gerlach. These investigators looked upon the eruption as due to the irritation of the staphylotoxin acting as a serotactic agent, i.e., an agent which repels the leucocytes, but attracts the serum. Bockhart goes as far as defining an eczema as "an infection inflammation of the epidermis caused by staphylococci." He thinks that staphylococci, normally present but inactive in the follicles, become from some external or internal disturbance active and excrete the staphylotoxin which passes through the wall of follicle into the intercellular spaces in the epidermis and there sets up a serotaxis with resulting vesication. At first the vesicle is sterile, but soon the staphylococci make their way into it and there exert a positive chemotactic action resulting in a greater or less degree of pustulation.

Unna holds a different view from that of Bockhart. In 1899 he reported that he found in large numbers in the skin in eczema a coccus which he named the "morococcus" from the fact that it tended to be arranged in groups like mulberries. His observation received little support. Moreover, it was soon shown that the morococcus, was probably the same as the staphylococcus epidermidis albus; and lately Unna has given up the belief that the morococcus is the cause of eczema. Unna, however, still believes in the microbic theory. He has isolated twenty-three cocci in a case of eczema. Of these twelve are harmless and eleven pathogenic. Two of the pathogenic varieties, which he has named "Neufang" and "Traubelpaas" after the names of patients from whom they were taken, are capable of producing an eczematoid eruption when inoculated on the skin.