

**ON AN EPIDEMIC SKIN DISEASE
RESEMBLING ECZEMA AND PITYRIASIS
RUBRA IN SOME RESPECTS,
WHICH OCCURRED CHIEFLY IN THE
WESTERN DISTRICT OF LONDON DURING
THE SUMMER AND AUTUMN OF 1891**

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On an epidemic skin disease resembling eczema and pityriasis rubra in some respects, which occurred chiefly in the western district of London during the summer and autumn of 1891 by
Thomas D. Savill

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THOMAS D. SAVILL

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D^rSavill's case of
EPIDERMIC SKIN DISEASE

West. Newman chromo.

TO Dr Putnam
U. S. C.
with the Author's Compl.

ON AN

EPIDEMIC SKIN DISEASE,

RESEMBLING ECZEMA AND PITYRIASIS RUBRA

IN SOME RESPECTS,

*WHICH OCCURRED CHIEFLY IN THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
LONDON DURING THE SUMMER AND AUTUMN OF 1891.*

A PAPER ORIGINALLY READ BEFORE THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON,
NOVEMBER 30TH, 1891,

AND

*Reprinted from the "British Journal of Dermatology" of February and March,
1892, with Corrections, Additions, and numerous Illustrations.*

BY

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LONDON

H. K. LEWIS, 136, GOWER STREET, W.C.

1892.

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DESCRIPTION OF COLOURED PLATE AND PHOTOTYPE 5.

CASE F. XXI.—*Maria T*——, æt. 68, the subject of our coloured illustration, *naturally a thin woman*, was admitted to II. ward on October 29th, 1890, for an eczematous ulcer of the left leg. The patient had formerly had "eczema," and six years before, an attack of erysipelas, followed by abscesses and loss of hair. The ulcer took nearly a year to heal; and it left a patch of chronic eczema on the left leg and thigh, which persisted until after the epidemic attack, *and then disappeared*.

On August 6th the epidemic malady started as a *clearly defined oval ring under the chin, perfectly clear in the centre, red and raised at the margin*, size of half-a-crown. This, after spreading a little, faded away in the course of a week. Then the eruption *broke out with redoubled vigour* on the forehead and rapidly spread. This time the eruption took the form of discrete papules, such as are seen on the chest in the plate, and vesicles. The coloured plate is intended to show the swelling of the skin round the neck and eyelids, so great that the latter could not be opened. This swelling is seen better in the photograph (phototype 5) of the same patient. The whole body was attacked, sooner or later, but the arms and face were always the worst, and here the swelling and thickening were very great, and the exudation considerable. The face at one time was half again as big as natural. The primary attack lasted 6½ weeks, and was followed by a slight relapse. The temperature varied between 97° and 99°; once it reached 100° when the swelling was at its height. The anorexia and asthenia were marked, at one time recovery being despaired of; there was some albuminuria, and the rash was followed by general wasting, alopecia, and leucoderma. *The initial patch beneath the chin is still marked by a white area, which contrasts strongly with the natural colour of the skin around.*

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The phototypes have been produced by the Woodbury process from negatives of my own, taken with an old-fashioned Baker's lens.

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CHIEFLY IN THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF LONDON DURING THE
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BY THOMAS D. SAVILL, M.D. LOND., D.P.H. CAMB.,
Medical Superintendent of the Paddington Infirmary, London.

ALL the cases of this disease which came to my knowledge occurred in the Western division of the Metropolis, excepting those in the Lambeth Infirmary, which is situated in the S.E. district. The following remarks are based on the 165 cases under my own care. On the whole, these seem to have been the most severe, and attended by the highest death-rate. Since I first drew attention to this disease in the *Lancet* of August 1st, 1891, several similar outbreaks have, on enquiry, been discovered in other institutions,* not only this year (1891), but also in previous years, and a good number of sporadic cases.†

Out of an average of 400 or 500 patients in the Infirmary and Sick-Wards of the workhouse, it is rarely that we are quite without some half-a-dozen cases of more or less localized eczema. Not unfrequently cases of acute general eczema come in; and occasionally a case of pityriasis rubra is admitted. Such cases are specially liable to occur in the autumn, so far as my memory serves me; but never before have we had a collection of cases of skin disease at all approaching the present one. Out of 846 (376 m. and 470 f.) patients who passed under treatment in the Infirmary and workhouse Sick-Wards between July 1st and October 31st, 1891, 168 (89 m. and 74 f.), or 19·2 per cent. have been attacked with the malady

* Mr. Hutchinson narrates an interesting epidemic which occurred in the Greenock Parochial Asylum, under the care of Dr. Frank A. Elkins, as far back as 1868 (*Archives of Surgery*, January, 1892, p. 228). About fifty patients had the eruption, and about twelve died. Some of the most robust attendants suffered, as well as the doctor himself.

† Particulars of the cases at Paddington and at other places will be found at the end.

I am about to describe. At first I took the disease to be acute general eczema; but as week by week fresh cases occurred I was struck by the differences which will be mentioned hereafter. Some had the disease very trivially, but most had quite half the surface of their bodies affected, and many were entirely covered with it. In a few it scarcely interfered with their usual health; but in most, the irritation of the skin and the concurrent constitutional disturbance rendered their condition a most unhappy one.

It may be mentioned that the disease broke out not only in many different wards at the same time, but also in two buildings which are totally distinct.* The cases were pretty evenly distributed in both buildings, excepting in the nursery and childrens' ward, which contained very few cases, and those chiefly among the adult patients who happened to be there at the time. In the Infirmary 6 cases broke out in I ward (containing chiefly children), 11 in II ward, 14 in III ward, 2 in IV ward, all female wards; 17 in V ward, 18 in VI ward, 17 in VII ward, and 4 in VIII ward, all male wards; IV and VIII wards were closed soon after the epidemic started.

Amongst the paid staff of both places there was remarkable immunity, the only persons attacked being myself and a housemaid. These are not included in the tabular statements. 151 of the 163 cases were patients under treatment for some other disease at the time the eruption attacked them. Only one patient (M. LVI.) was brought in with the skin affection, at a date when many other patients were already affected. Only five male and six female cases occurred amongst the inmates of the workhouse proper.

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE.

First of all, I will give an account of a case which may be regarded as fairly typical; and then conclude with some general remarks, founded on the analysis of the cases.

* The two buildings are the New Paddington Infirmary and the Old Workhouse Sick-Wards. They stand on adjacent grounds, separated by a wall only. The New Paddington Infirmary, like the Marylebone Infirmary, where a similar outbreak occurred at the same time, is a modern building replete with every modern sanitary improvement. The old Sick-Wards of the workhouse are a part of the workhouse, and governed by the master, quite distinct from the Infirmary. The staffs of the two places are totally separate, and the buildings are separate institutions. The only points they have in common are the medical staff, who have charge of both institutions, and the Board of Guardians, which governs both.