

H Duhring (L. A.)

ON

THE STUDY OF DERMATOLOGY.

BY

LOUIS A. DUHRING, M. D.,

PHYSICIAN TO THE DISPENSARY FOR SKIN DISEASES, PHILADELPHIA.

REPRINTED FROM

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A QUARTERLY REVIEW, DEVOTED TO THE CONSIDERATION OF

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INCLUDING ALL DISEASES HAVING A VENEREAL ORIGIN OR LEISON,
AND THEIR TREATMENT.

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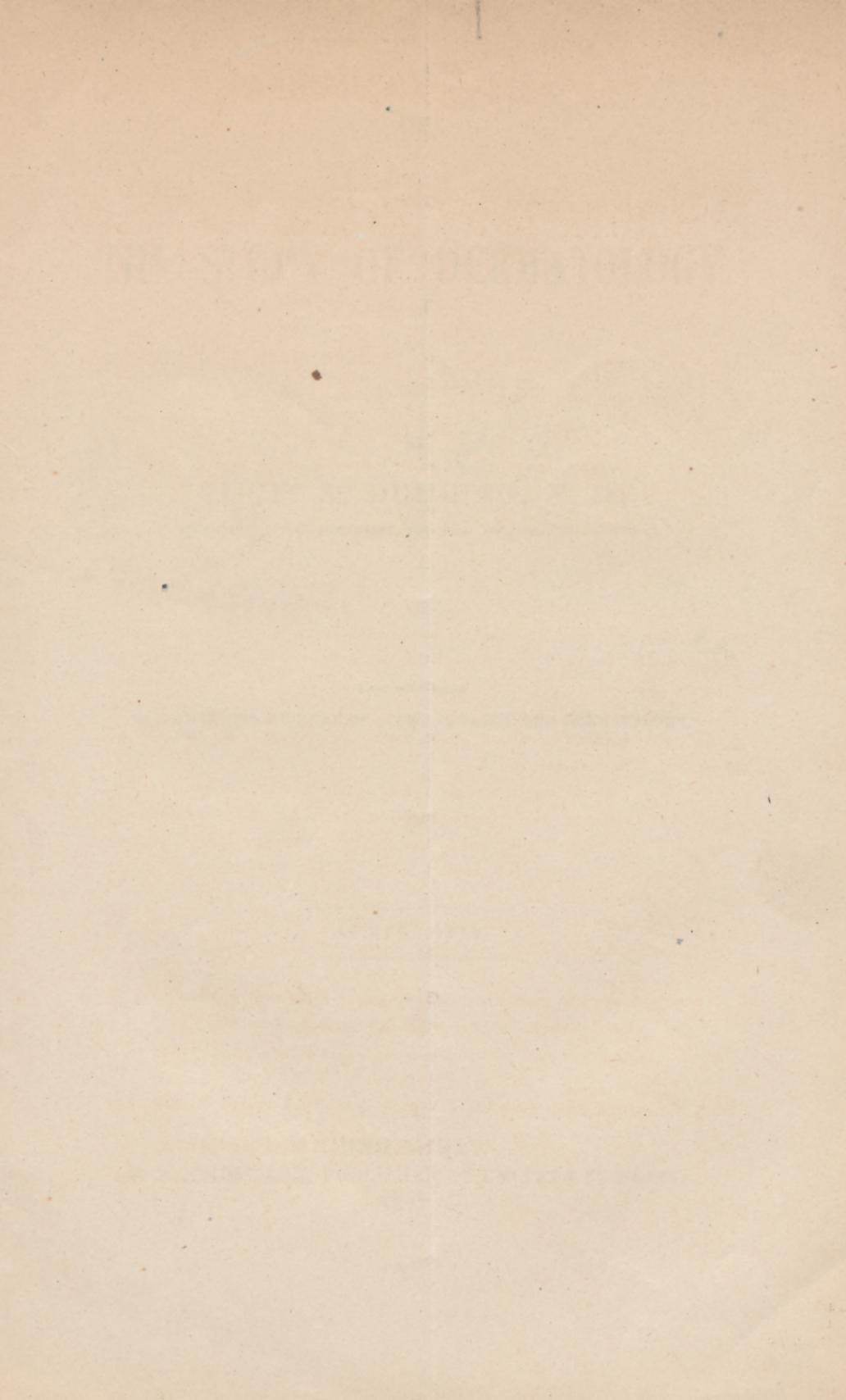
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OF late the science of dermatology has taken such rapid strides forward, that if we examine the doctrines taught and regarded as true some thirty years ago, we shall find them widely different from those entertained by modern pathologists and investigators. The numerous experiments and observations made within the last twenty years have done much towards clearing away the mystery that for so long a time surrounded these troublesome and often obstinate affections. Thanks to the honest investigations of some of our more recent dermatologists, the science is gradually being freed from the many ambiguities and fears that but a short time ago seemed about to crowd it out of its proper place, and to obliterate it from the list of the sciences. Nor have these advances and discoveries been made without the most diligent and continuous work on the part of men who have devoted their lives to a just comprehension of these diseases,—labor pursued amid a storm of opposition from their contemporaries, a tangle of traditional and erroneous ideas, and a confusion of nomenclature which would daunt any but the most determined. For years past so firmly and securely have false theories and notions regarding the nature of skin diseases been fixed in the minds of men, that time, patience, and the greatest amount of exertion have been necessary to induce people to give up faulty theories, and to credit facts rather than tradition. Moreover, the unfortunate nomenclature handed down to us from our early teachers, with the addition of innumerable alterations and countless accessions, has had to answer for a great deal. This alone has always been a serious obstacle to the advance of dermatology—a stumbling-block that has terrified many, and even dissuaded them from attempting its study. In its present condition, though com-

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paratively free from entanglement and disorder, it still possesses far too many synonyms and doubtful expressions, and until it assumes a more compact and definite form, capable of easier comprehension, progress will undoubtedly be retarded. Even to-day, each country claims its own nomenclature for diseases of the skin, which it defends pertinaciously, caring apparently more for technicalities and words than for some recognized common form, which the whole civilized world can use and comprehend. We need some settled formulary of terms for these diseases, one that all nations can employ and understand; and until one country can converse with another about one and the same disease, using the same terms, or, if that is not possible, terms which always express the same affection, there can be but little hope for a wide-spread knowledge of the subject. In our own land, we see confusion and uncertainty existing, to such an extent that, instead of the mere name, which among scientific men should be ample, an actual explanation of the disease is in many cases necessary. Let us hope that ere long we may look for a reconciliation in regard to this matter, and that we as a nation may possess a nomenclature, simple and uncomplicated, one that shall be intelligible at least to ourselves, if not to the world at large. At the present epoch the student who would become a thorough dermatologist does not content himself with the works of Willan or Alibert, but, with the most recent and comprehensive volumes, finds his way to the clinic of some great hospital, and there at the bedside, under the direction of some recognized master, begins his studies. It is at the clinic, in the wards of a hospital, that a knowledge of these affections is acquired, and in this way only is it obtainable. In entering upon the study of any new field of science, there are certain phenomena and facts which we are compelled to accept as correct before we can proceed; these must serve as a basis upon which to build, and must be accepted on faith, for the time being. Especially is this remark applicable in regard to the study of dermatology. As students, we know a cutaneous affection to be such, and to have such a name, solely and simply because we have been told that such was the case, and have believed it; but advancing in our studies, we find

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ourselves acquiring the power of diagnosing correctly and of deciding for ourselves. This faculty of knowing how to investigate and study, we have obtained to a great extent from the teachings of our preceptor, and also from our past clinical experience. Nowhere in the study of medicine is the necessity for a master, a thorough teacher, more seriously felt than in the investigation of this class of affections. A reliable and competent instructor is the first step to be taken towards obtaining a knowledge of the subject, and without such aid we shall not be able to secure a firm and solid foundation upon which to work when we are thrown upon our own resources. Perhaps the next point of importance is access to a clinic or hospital, where cases may be seen and examined; for no other method will give the student such a clue to these diseases and their numerous phases as constant contact with patients. It familiarizes him with conditions and appearances that would otherwise be but very imperfectly explained or perhaps altogether lost. The treatment of diseases of the skin should be a matter of secondary importance to the student, bearing in mind that, without first being a thorough diagnostician, capable of embracing the whole course of a disease, his therapeutics, however judiciously advised, can never be effectual. The power of making a correct diagnosis is the key to all success in the treatment of skin diseases; without this faculty, the physician can never be a thorough dermatologist, and therapeutics at once cease to hold their proper position, and become empirical.

Until within a very few years the study of dermatology, as a special branch of medicine, has received but little attention and encouragement in our country, and the lack of hospitals and institutions for these affections has forced students to seek instruction and material in other countries. The various schools of dermatology in Europe have always enjoyed a high reputation, especially those of Vienna, Paris, and London, where this branch of medicine has been taught and studied during the last fifty years. At the present period Germany possesses only one recognized school of dermatology, and this is the Vienna school. Berlin, though it has ever been one of the great medical centers of Europe, has never occupied a prominent position in re-

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ference to dermatology, and the same observation may be made in regard to the other cities of Germany. France, centered in Paris, has always taken a warm interest in the study of these diseases, and has contributed greatly to promote the science and elevate it to its just position. England likewise has ever been a good friend of our science, and since the time of Willan has endeavored to maintain and defend his views and doctrines with spirit and zeal. Without referring to the subject as found in other localities, we would state that at the present day the teachings of Vienna, Paris, and London represent the dermatology of Europe, for we see the other countries adopting, with more or less variation, one or the other of these schools as their standard. The views of these three centers differ very much, not only in regard to the theories they hold concerning pathology, but also in reference to the treatment of these diseases. Not to speak of the past, let us take a glance at the subject as we find it taught in these cities to-day, and point out the advantages for study in each, remarking that it is our intention to refrain from all criticism or argument regarding the theories and views which they may entertain, and which tend to separate one school from the other. The dermatology of Great Britain is represented by faithful and earnest workers, and the names of many are well known to us all. Among those who occupy prominent positions in connection with institutions devoted to these affections, we would mention the names of Wilson, Starlin, Fox, Anderson, Hutchinson, Fagge, Milton, Purdon, Sims, Squire, and Gee, all of whom have from time to time added contributions to English dermatology, and have shown a cordial interest in the destiny of this department of medicine. Several of the above named have devoted their lives to acquiring a knowledge of these diseases, and through their own enthusiasm have done much towards kindling that of others. As one would naturally imagine, dermatology finds a center in the great metropolis of the world, and it is here that a just idea of the English school is to be acquired. Perhaps one of the greatest advantages that London presents to the dermatologist, is the opportunity of seeing an almost endless number of cases, and thus becoming acquainted with some

of the rarer forms of disease. The material collected from a population of three millions necessarily brings together interesting and rare diseases, and by seeking access to several of the more extensive institutions, a large proportion of unfrequent affections may be seen. London possesses many institutions for the treatment of cutaneous affections, the majority of them being dispensaries, though they often bear the name of hospitals. The want here of a large hospital supplied with a number of beds, has always been an impediment to research and investigation, and especially unfortunate has this want proved for those who would study these diseases in all their aspects and changes. Dispensary service is eminently valuable for the opportunity it offers for seeing cases and making diagnoses, but the results obtained in the treatment must, as a rule, be received with caution. A service of this kind, where cases come and go at will, often very irregularly, using and abusing remedies, as the case may be, can never present the same definite results and statistics obtainable in hospital practice. Nowhere in London does there appear to be regular and systematic clinical teaching, and this need perhaps constitutes the great drawback to the study of dermatology in this city. Many of the institutions accumulate abundance of material, but there is no provision made for the student to receive elementary instruction, he having to depend almost entirely upon his own observations for information and improvement. Neither does the investigation of these diseases in these institutions receive the time or attention requisite for their full comprehension. Superficial examinations doubtless in most cases arise from the fact, that too little time is appropriated for the number of patients seen, but at the same time this neglect does not betoken the earnestness necessary to a thorough understanding of the subject. London lacks a system of study which would comprise a thorough course of lectures accompanied with clinical teaching, and a hospital where students might study under experienced masters and follow up the science in its numerous details. Until such a change is brought about, it can never take an equal rank, as a school of dermatology, with other countries.

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Unlike London, this department in Paris is centered under one roof, in the great "Hôpital St. Louis," a venerable institution that has assisted the studies and investigations of such men as Alibert, Biett, Schedel, Gibert, and other eminent dermatologists. The St. Louis contains about six hundred beds devoted to diseases of the skin, under the direction of six attending physicians, who appropriate two or three hours daily to their wards, assisted by their "internes." In connection with the hospital there is an immense dispensary service every morning, numbering upon an average one hundred and fifty new cases. The most interesting and grave of these diseases supply the hospital with material; the rest are either treated as dispensary patients, or are given advice and dismissed. This is the largest hospital for skin diseases extant, and by far the largest dispensary service in Europe. The material collected at the St. Louis is varied and very extensive, embracing all of the commoner varieties of disease, and many of the rarer forms. Although the opportunities here are of great value, comprising the immense hospital, the collection of cases almost without number, the easy access to the patients and their examination, yet the want of clinical instruction is here too, as in London, seriously experienced. The student is thrown upon his own resources, and can obtain knowledge of the subject by close attention and observation alone, for there are but very few regular and systematic courses of teaching. The "*corps dermatologique*" contains many men of eminence, and some who have obtained a well-earned and merited reputation. Connected with the St. Louis we find MM. Bazin, Hardy, Lailler, Vidal, Hillairet, and Guibout, while the names of Devergie, Cazenave, Ricord, Fournier, Rochard, Diday, Dron, Rollet, and Doyon, are all identified with this specialty in France. In some respects the hospitals of Paris have no equal for the study of cutaneous maladies, and provided the student have already acquired a knowledge of the subject, and is capable of pursuing his studies alone, the St. Louis is a grand field.

In Vienna all the medical sciences are much more divided and subdivided than elsewhere. Here the various specialties, grounded upon a true and solid foundation, are worked and

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investigated to the finest degree, and here it is that specialties assume their proper shape, and add science and renown to the profession. Among the many branches of medicine, dermatology holds a conspicuous and prominent place, and is studied with a zeal and earnestness such as is rarely seen elsewhere. The Allgemeines Krankenhaus has been the seat of dermatology for many years past, and more especially has it assumed such an important position since the researches of Hebra have been made public. With the discoveries of this thorough dermatologist the study took a new life and stand in Germany, steadily developing, until it has reached the position we now behold—one of the most definite of the specialties of medicine. The department for skin diseases at this hospital contains a number of wards with accommodation for about two hundred patients, the whole being under the immediate supervision of Professor Hebra. For the student who wishes to pursue dermatology, a plan of study is arranged; and, beginning with the anatomy of the skin and the elementary details, he gradually works his way up, with the assistance of able teachers, to a position that will enable him to proceed alone. Systematic lectures and clinics both for the beginner and the more advanced student are continually being given, and pains taken to meet the desires of all. Courses of instruction are even provided for those who may wish to study specially the diagnosis, treatment, or pathology of these affections, affording an opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with all the minutiae of the subject. The superior advantages offered in Vienna for the study of these diseases are unsurpassable, and the student who would thoroughly grasp the subject can find no better school and place to begin his work. Here he will find himself able to procure a foundation upon which to build when thrown upon his own resources, and without which enthusiasm would be fruitless and time wasted. The lively interest shown in dermatology throughout Germany is patent enough to us all, and the well-directed and earnest labors of such dermatologists as Hebra, Auspitz, Pick, Köbner, Neumann, Kohn, Veiel, Biesiadcki, Zeissl, Sigmund, Lindwurm, Rindfleisch, and many others, must make us mindful that the science here is steadily assuming

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greater proportions, and well deserves the reputation she has earned.

The treatment of diseases of the skin has passed through so many severe ordeals and diversified experiences, throughout the world, that, until quite recently, it has been in a most deplorable condition. From time immemorial the number of remedies employed for the cure of various diseases has been so great, that an enumeration would be an utter impossibility. Specifics without number, for all diseases, have from time to time been vaunted, the majority of which, when fairly tested, have failed utterly. Certainly no class of affections has been subject to such abuses through the inordinate prescribing of medicines, many of which have apparently been given only in order to swell the roll of prescriptions. The honest examinations of some of our dermatologists, however, have cleared from our list many of these alleged remedies, and in their place we have the plain truth that as yet no positive specifics have been found. The plan of treatment pursued in the three schools alluded to, is very different in many particulars. Whether it be that a dissimilar plan of therapeutics is absolutely required for distinct countries, or that one school is in advance of the other, is a question that experience will decide. As before stated, some of the diseases certainly do appear to assume a milder aspect in one country than in another—thus calling for a less severe method of handling.

To refer to typical diseases, it is noticeable that the same affection takes on an unlike course in various countries and among separate nations. For instance, if the well-known and distressing disease, *Lupus Vulgaris*, is examined in Austria, and again in France and England, as a rule, a marked difference in its course, gravity, and termination will be observed. This malady, so common in Austria and the southeast of Europe, particularly in the Danubian provinces, where it may be seen in its most virulent form, is a type of disease markedly local. In no other countries are such obstinate and severe cases of this unfortunate disease to be found. The *Lupus*, both of France and England, bear very much the same characters and course. Here it is a comparatively mild affection, and amenable to

treatment; but in Austria it is often most desperate. In the latter country it is not at all uncommon to meet with cases of twenty years' standing, often involving the whole face, back, and limbs; at one time stationary, and again spreading with fearful ravages and destruction of tissue. To account for this difference of degree and form in diseases occurring in these countries, it is necessary to look into the conditions of life. For, social standing, mode of living, and diet, must all play an active part in the evolution of such cutaneous affections, and the cause of this difference is doubtless to be found among the above-named influences. Noticing these peculiarities in certain districts, we are enlightened partially as to the discrepancy in treatment between several of the schools; but this should be only one of degree, and not affect the method. Selecting diseases which run their courses the same in all countries, we shall find that even in regard to the treatment of these, the views of the three schools are at variance. The German school, with Hebra at its head, deals more with facts than theories, and relies more upon experience in reference to treatment than upon speculation. It argues that as yet the cause of most of the diseases of the skin is too obscure to admit of a rational internal treatment, with a view to a positive result; and consequently, with very few exceptions, medicines acting as specifics are entirely ignored, dependence being placed upon other and more sure methods of cure.

The school of Hebra maintains that the direct and exciting cause of a disease should at once be sought for, and if found, receive the treatment adapted to its needs. But in addition to an internal treatment that may be adopted, it insists upon a vigorous and systematic plan of external treatment as well. In cases where the cause of a disease is unknown, the whole attention is devoted to external therapeutics, and certain changes are brought about which tend to ameliorate, if a cure be impossible. In many cases it looks upon these affections as simple disorders of the integumentary system—*i. e.*, not as constitutional or diathetic diseases—and as such gives them a purely local and external handling. The plan pursued for the cure of cutaneous disorders by the Vienna school is undoubtedly more

simple and rational than that of any other, and the benefits derived therefrom speak for themselves.

The French school ignores totally the methods practiced by other nations, and upholds its own doctrines with great pertinacity. It claims that the majority of these disorders are the results of a diathesis, by which is meant some peculiarity of the economy which predisposes to certain eruptions, and that the therapeutics should be directed against the disease internally; it, however, also advises external treatment, but of such a feeble character that scarcely any effect is produced upon the skin. Again, great results are anticipated from baths, both simple and medicated, while emollient dressings, poultices, and bland ointments, constitute a feature in the list of remedies employed.

The English school still adheres closely to the doctrines expounded by Willan in the latter part of the last century. The truths that were announced at that time in reference to many of these diseases, are unquestionably as correct and valuable now as then; at the same time it must not be forgotten that science has, in the intervening years, taken many strides forward. The views of some of the English writers of the present day are by no means in accord with recent study and research as pursued in other countries, and many adopt their own ideas and theories with a complacency somewhat startling to progressive and generous minds. External treatment is considered almost useless and often unnecessary. Internal medicines and remedies are relied upon to an unlimited extent, and upon these it depends mainly for the cure of such diseases. To be just, we would wish it understood that the above remarks apply to the London school, as unmodified by association with Continental ideas.

To sum up, undoubtedly all three centers offer great attractions, and for a correct understanding of the subject, we should deem a visit to each essential. For in each of the countries, situated as they are at some distance from one another, and surrounded by the various influences of climate, habits, mode of living, etc., we notice distinct aspects of one and the same disease. This fact is forced upon the attention of every scien-

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tific traveler, although any attempt at special description would be unsatisfactory.

Concerning the study of dermatology in our own country, a wide field at once opens for discussion, from which we would withhold for the present, remarking however, that though in the past very little interest has been shown in the subject, of late the establishment in our cities of separate institutions and departments connected with our hospitals, tends to show that the proper spirit has been awakened. Let us anxiously await the period when our nation shall claim a school of its own, a true and honest eclectic school, including the good points and sound theories selected from our European friends, together with the results of our own investigations and labors.

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