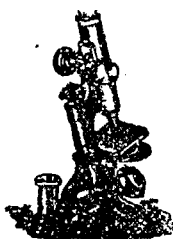


Medical Matters.

CARCINOMA A PARASITIC DISEASE.



Mr. Henry T. Butlin, F.R.C.S., Consulting Surgeon to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, last week delivered the Bradshaw Lecture before the Royal College of Surgeons, in which he insisted on the parasitic nature of cancer. He showed that many distinguished men have believed in the existence of a cancer parasite, and have presented it in one form or another to the scientific world, but so far on examination and testing it has always been found wanting, so that the Director of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, Dr. E. F. Bashford, in the Scientific Report for 1905 says "the parasitic hypothesis has been subjected to severe criticism in practically every text-book of pathology." "Yet," says Mr. Butlin, "so strong is the feeling in the minds of many surgeons in favour of the parasite theory that I confess I experienced a grave sense of disappointment when I found it ruthlessly condemned by our director.

The lecture, which may be read in full in the *Lancet* of 16th inst., is of great interest. Mr. Butlin insists that "carcinoma is a parasitic disease, not in the limited sense in which the term appears to have been used of late as synonymous with infective, but in the larger and wider sense in which it used to be, and should always be, employed to express the fact of one organism living at the expense of another organism, each pursuing its otherwise separate and independent existence. The organism which lives upon the other is the parasite, and the organism on which it lives is the host."

He proceeded to show that the very youngest carcinoma of the skin consists of cells which resemble, in many respects, the cells of the epidermis, and may be in contact with its processes, but which cannot be shown to be derived from its cells, nor are they transformed into normal cells. The growth of carcinoma depends on the growth and reproduction of its own proper cells, not on transformation of the neighbouring cells into carcinoma cells. The normal cells

may be thrust aside by the carcinoma cells, or undermined, or atrophied, or actually destroyed, but they are not transformed. A third point is the origin of the stroma or framework of carcinoma.

Pathologists now are able to state that it is derived from the connective tissue of the part in which the carcinoma grows, and does not depend on the transformation of the carcinoma cells. The essential point to be remembered is thus that there is no transformation of normal cells into carcinoma cells in the course of the growth of the disease, and that the stroma is not derived from the cells of the carcinoma. Mr. Butlin maintains on this and other grounds that the carcinoma cell is an independent organism like many a protozoan, that it lives a life which is wholly independent and proper to itself; and that it lives as a parasite in the body of the animal which is affected with carcinoma, deriving its nourishment from the host, and doing nothing to pay the host for the sustenance of which it robs him.

With regard to the general condition of the host at the time of the first appearance of carcinoma the lecturer said, "It is a matter of common knowledge that many parasites, particularly vegetable, obtain access to the body of the host when its strength is impaired, and it is equally a matter of common knowledge to our profession that many of the patients who suffer from carcinoma are for their age in a full average of general good health. But it must not be forgotten that although the health of the whole body may be, or seems to be unimpaired, the health of the part attacked is more frequently impaired than not. Of the greater liability of one sex than another to carcinoma it may be safely held that this is largely a question of the greater or less liability of particular organs and tissues, and of their condition at the time of the attack. And, again, of inheritance it may be said that it is the inheritance, not of the disease, but of organs and tissues which are peculiarly vulnerable to the disease, and that the nature of the inheritance is the same as that of many persons to the attack of the tubercle bacillus."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)