

Medical Matters.

THE TREATMENT OF SPRUE BY STRAWBERRIES.



Dr. Maurice F. Squire reports in the *Lancet* a case of sprue which he has successfully treated by the administration of strawberries to the affected patient. Sprue or psilosis is a disease of the intestinal tract (rarely seen in this country) which is due to atrophy of the mucous glands of the small intestine giving rise to severe diarrhoea. As a rule it resists treatment with extreme obstinacy.

The patient who was admitted to the Paddington Infirmary, of which Dr. Squire is Medical Superintendent, had been in India for about eight years, and, with the exception of an attack of "slow continued fever," was in good health when there. He returned home in March, 1904, and remained well until December, 1904, when he suffered from repeated attacks of vomiting and diarrhoea with progressive emaciation, which continued with varying severity until the time of his admission to the infirmary.

Various remedies were tried, with no permanent improvement, and in the middle of June, 1905, it was realised that the patient's condition was due to sprue. He was then ordered a strict milk diet, given in small quantities frequently, amounting to three pints per diem and later increased to four pints, which seemed to be about as much as he could digest. He soon began to improve, the diarrhoea diminished perceptibly, and after a fortnight the stools were not more than one or two per diem; they were more formed, though still clay-coloured and very offensive. The bared patches on the tongue healed and the patient seemed better in every way. By the middle of August the stools were not more frequent than one a day and were generally normal in appearance, though still rather offensive. The patient was of a gluttonous nature and difficult to manage as regards his diet; he now became very restive under the treatment, and after much grumbling his diet was increased by the addition of bread-and-milk and subsequently bread-and-butter and an egg; but soon afterwards his stools returned to their previously grey liquid and yeasty state, he rapidly lost flesh, and the ulcers reappeared on the tongue. He was again put on a strict milk diet with a similar result as regards the improvement, the grumbling as he got stronger, and the relapse on increasing the diet. During the winter and

spring following, different drugs and foods were tried, some with temporary benefit, but each relapse left him weaker than the previous one. He was weighed several times and he never scaled more than 81 pounds, which was about half his normal weight.

Dr. Squire reports "having heard of the strawberry treatment for sprue I determined to try it as a last resource, and on June 8th last I ordered him one pound of strawberries per diem in conjunction with the diet he had been taking for some weeks previously, consisting of three pints of milk, a pint of beef-tea, bread and margarine, milk pudding, and an egg as the daily allowance, and all drugs were stopped. On the 16th the improvement was marked; he had regained sufficient strength to be put upon the scales and he weighed 70 pounds, his stools were less yeasty, and some small abraded patches which had been present on the sides of his tongue had healed. I increased his daily ration of strawberries to two pounds and on July 2nd to three pounds when he weighed 81 pounds, though his stools were still clay coloured. On the 20th he weighed 96 pounds; his stools were formed, not unusually offensive and of a light-brown colour. He was feeling better than he had done since the commencement of his illness and I added some boiled fish to his diet. On the 31st some oedema of the feet and legs appeared, associated with irregularity of the pulse, but the cardiac weakness was corrected in a few weeks by small doses of digitalis and squill and in other respects his progress towards recovery was maintained. The supply of strawberries rapidly deteriorated owing to the hot dry weather, and on August 6th I discontinued them; he then weighed 120 pounds and his stools were normal in consistency, colour, and frequency. On September 4th he was put on the ordinary meat diet of the infirmary and he took his discharge on October 9th, weighing 150 pounds.

"This case was an extremely interesting one in that it demonstrated the usual impotency of drugs to affect the course of sprue and the marked benefit derived from an exclusive-milk diet, which I think might have yielded a satisfactory result if the patient could have been induced to submit to it for a longer period. Then comes the question of the strawberries, and from the facts narrated above it is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that they were the curative agent in this instance; they seem to have supplied something which enabled the alimentary canal to digest and assimilate the nourishment provided in the diet, but beyond that I am unable to discuss the chemistry of the subject."

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