AN INAUGURAL DISSERTATION,
ON
Trismus Nascentium.
SUBMITTED TO THE
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This disease is confined to early childhood. Usually, the first symptom which arrests the attention of the mother is the difficulty, which the child discovers, in taking the nipple. In making an effort to suck it appears to be troubled with dyspnea, and rolls its head to one side and screams, or makes some mournful noise. The symptoms becoming aggravated, the mother is at length alarmed; most generally apprehending that the child has croup. As the disease progresses, the jaws become stiff, and the child is no longer able to open its mouth sufficiently wide to take the nipple. Very soon the spine is affected, and at length, regular tetanic spasms supervene.
Not unfrequently, upon examination, it will be found that the cranial bones are displaced, and sometimes also, there is stran-}

ging. In some cases, the disease sets in with greater violence from the first, and the paroxysms partake more of the character of Epilepsy, coming on with more or less frequen-

cy and increasing in severity until in a few days at most, they carry off the little sufferer, blaz-

ing the hopes of the fond mother. The action of the heart is always increased during the paroxysms.

As the disease becomes more con-

firmed, the rigidity of the back, jaw, and extremities increases, the intervals between the paroxysms grow shorter, and frequently the child remains stiff as a board for several hours at a time.
There is no disease with which Trismus Nascentium is likely to be confounded, unless it be Croup or Epilepsy. It is easily distinguished from the former, because the characteristic symptoms of Croup are absent, nor is it likely that so young a subject would be attacked by this last mentioned disease. Neither is Epilepsy likely to come on at so early a period of life—more over the intervals between the paroxysms in this disease are more marked, neither is it so fatal. The prognosis of Trismus Nascentium is bad enough—almost hopeless. With respect to its pathology and causes:

In the medical journals of the day, the idea is advanced & cases cited in support of this theory,
that the disease is caused by a displacement of the bone of the Cranium, thereby producing compression or irritation of the bones of the Cerebral mar, and giving rise to all the train of unmanageable symptoms that present themselves. Although in many instances the disease may have originated in this manner, yet it is by no means probable that it is the only cause. It is a circumstance which goes strongly to improve this hypothesis, that it is a custom with some tribes of Indians to compress the heads of their children soon after birth, in order to shape them fancifully.

Now if a displacement of the bone of the Cranium were in all instances, attended or indeed very often
attended with fatal consequences, it seems improbable that such a custom could long have prevailed.

On the other hand, there are others who contend that the disease has its origin in a want of proper attention to the dressing and after treatment of the funis; they think that by properly dressing the umbilical chord, and by keeping the parts clean and dry, the disease may be prevented. This view of the case has been ably sustained by Professor Watson, who has demonstrated conclusively, that by proper care and attention with respect to the funis, the disease may almost always be avoided. He enjoins cleanliness and the removal of the dressing, wherever soiled by the
excrement of the child. His instructions with respect to the removal of the dribbling when soiled, and also with regard to the treatment of the chord are very plain and precise. Since the publication of Dr. Watson's pamphlet, I have adopted his plan of dribbling the urine, and have found it very neat and convenient.

A number of other circumstances are said to give rise sometimes to the disease under consideration; as for instance, coarse and rough dribbling applied next to the very delicate and tender skin of the child; also cold and improper diet. Inasmuch as the disease occurs so soon after birth, it is not probable that it is caused by improper diet; however this...
any danger arising from this cause, may as well be guarded against, by directing that the child be placed at its mother's breast, as soon as she is sufficiently rested from the fatigue and exhaustion of her labor, to allow of it. If however, her milk should be too tardy in coming, for the safety of the child, it will be proper to direct that a little sweet milk, diluted and sweetened, be administered to the child occasionally. That is supposed to be a prolific cause in the West Indies, where many deaths occur from this disease, as well as in our own Southern States. Instead however of attributing the disease to heat or cold, or to a displacement of the bones of the cranium, it would be much more in accordance with common sense and sound philos-
overy, to refer it the improper management of the children, especially of the negroes of the large plantations of the South, amongst whom, carelessness and inattention are proverbial. Amongst them, it is much more probable that the disease is caused by want of proper dressing for the delicate infant, and the habit of lying the child upon its back in the lumpy trough cradle, than by heat or cold, or by the displacement of the bones of the cranium. In Smith County, where the disease has not been uncommon, I remember that my preceptor had several cases under treatment during my,pupilage. He refers the disease generally to a want of attention to the family, but was of the opinion that it might sometimes have its origin,
in the circumstances of pins concealed about the body of the child & piercing it, owing to the carelessness of the nurse. He advised me therefore, in all instances where called to see such cases, not only to have an eye to the pains, but to cause the child to be undressed & closely examined, lest there might be pins sticking in its body.

With respect to the treatment of the disease, I do not expect to make any suggestions that have not been frequently discussed in the journals of the day, or in the regular works on the diseases of children. The bowels should be kept open, and for this purpose the cold-pressed castor oil, or Hydrargyrum Cam Creta, or Calcinus Magnesia, in sufficient doses, may be exhibited. After the bowels have been moved sufficiently...
I have found the paregoric elixir exhibited in doses large enough to produce induce sleep and relieve the spasms, to be of great benefit. I have seen the little sufferer, after taking a well regulated dose of it, quietly fall into a sound sleep and rest for hours, waking up with appetite much refreshed, with appetite improved, and awakening the fond hopes of the destitute mother—alas! but too often doomed to disappointment. Particular attention should be paid to the condition of the umbilicus; if the cord is not yet detached, it should be carefully examined; and if the droppings are not dry and clean, but on the contrary, hard and stiff, from being previously saturated with the excretions of the part, they should be immediately removed, and clean soft
drippings applied. If upon examination, the parts around the chord are found to be excoriated or inflamed, they should be carefully dried, and touched with a solution of lunar caustic; or, care the lint may be applied for a short time. If the lint be used immediately after its removal, the umbilicus should be draped with some simple cerate. If the chord has fallen off, as is frequently the case, the umbilicus should still be carefully inspected and receive such attention as it demands. The condition of the bladder should be closely watched, and if it should be found to be distended at any time, bee tea or some other diuretic should be administered until relief is obtained. Should there be any displacement of the bones of the cranium, as for instance, an elongation of the head,
or a sliding of the edges of the bones at the different sutures, they should be replaced for the sake of the beauty of the shape of the head, if for no other purpose. As is usual with some, I will send my unsuccessful cases to the Catacombs of the fathers, (merely saying that they were bad enough) having nevertreated but two cases successfully.