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PEDICULOSIS VESTIMENTORUM

PEDICULOSIS CORPORIS

Synonyms: *Pediculosis vestimenti seu vestimentorum*; *Phthiriasis capitis*; Vagabond's disease;
Body-lousiness.

The body louse, *Pediculus corporis*, closely resembles *Pediculus capitis* in its development and in appearance, but is considerably larger being from two to four millimeters long. It inhabits the underclothes and lays its eggs in the seams and creases and sometimes in the meshes of a coarsely woven garment. Occasionally a few nits may be found upon the trunk attached to lanugo hairs. The body louse goes onto the skin only for the purpose of feeding, and the lesions produced by the insect are to be found in greatest number in those regions which are most constantly in intimate contact with the clothing, i.e., as a rule, upon the neck and shoulders, about the waist and on the sacrum, buttocks and upper parts of the thighs. The extent and severity of the skin symptoms vary with the grade and duration of the infestation and the cutaneous irritability of the patient. The lice, in feeding, inflict minute wounds in the mouths of the follicles, thereby producing hemorrhagic puncta just on a level with the surface of the skin. These lesions are almost pathognomonic of the disease; they always itch and sometimes give rise to evanescent wheal-like swellings. In his efforts to relieve the pruritus the patient produces numerous parallel, linear excoriations with his nails. The scratching

is sometimes so violent that part of the corium is dug away, which results ultimately in the formation of narrow atrophic scars. When the lousiness has been long tolerated the continued irritation and consequent hyperemia cause a more or less diffuse but mottled pigmentation that is not unlike the discoloration of Addison's disease. The conditions are favorable for the contraction and spread of the various pyogenic skin infections, but in this country the severe forms of the malady due to prolonged neglect and complicated by dermatitis, ecthyma, furunculosis, abscesses, etc., are not often seen. **DIAGNOSIS:** The discovery of a louse or the nits in the seams of the underclothes is sufficient, but even in their absence,—as when the patient has recently changed his clothing,—the distribution of the lesions, the punctiform hemorrhages, parallel excoriations and pigmentation make the diagnosis comparatively easy. **TREATMENT:** Attention should be directed mainly toward the clothing and bed linen, which are to be immersed in boiling water or subjected to a temperature of 165° to 170° F. in an oven. To destroy any nits that may be present on the body, the latter should be anointed with a 20 per cent ointment of staphisagria, made by adding two drachms of the freshly powdered seed to the ounce of hot lard, which is then to be strained and cooled.