CASE REPORT

BRONCHO-PNEUMONIA IN A CRETIN BEFORE AND AFTER TREATMENT WITH THYROID

BY

A. MORTON GILL, M.D., M.R.C.P.

(From the Slough Emergency Hospital, E.M.S.)

Owing to the lowered general metabolism, a hypothyroid person, whether suffering from cretinism or myxoedema, would be expected to react to an acute infection in a subnormal fashion, and it is generally recognized that this is what actually occurs. Rarely, however, can it be possible to witness an acute infection attacking an individual, first in the hypothyroid state and then once more after metabolism has been restored to normal. The following case is an example of such an occurrence.

Case report

J. H., female, aged eleven months, was admitted on February 2, 1940. There were no previous illnesses and nothing relevant in the family history.

FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.

Birth had been normal, birth weight 8 lb. 1½ oz. Breast feeding was carried out for the first six months, following which the infant had been given a full cream dried milk mixture. Feeding had been extremely difficult owing to lack of interest, and the weight on admission to hospital was only 13 lb. A week previous to admission the baby had developed a common cold, but the general condition had remained good for several days and then deteriorated with the development of vomiting, diarrhoea, cough and rapid bubbling respirations.

On examination the infant was moderately ill, with some cyanosis, alae nasi working and an expiratory grunt. Physical examination of the chest revealed extensive areas of consolidation affecting the upper and middle zones of the left lung and the lower zone of the right lung, and it was evident that a severe broncho-pneumonia was present. Despite the extent of the pulmonary lesions the temperature and respiration rates, and especially the pulse rate, remained at a comparatively low level (see fig. 1), and it was thought that this striking feature could be accounted for by the fact that the infant was evidently a cretin, presenting typical facies (see fig. 2), broad large tongue, coarse dry skin and hair, short square neck with supra-clavicular pads of fat, stumpy thick-set trunk and short limbs, a widely patent anterior fontanelle, no teeth, protuberant abdomen and umbilical hernia.

Treatment was given along the usual lines, including sulphapyridine, oxygen tent, and two-hourly feeds alternating half strength normal saline and boiled cow's milk. As can be seen from fig 1, there was never any respiratory embarrassment, the fever remaining at a moderate level, as did the pulse rate, and the whole condition resolved satisfactorily.

The cretinism responded in the usual way to thyroideum B.P., starting with ¼ grain daily and gradually increasing the dose, and as this took effect feeding became easier each day until eventually after three weeks the infant was on a full mixed diet and had been entirely weaned from the bottle.

A few days later, when about to be discharged she developed another cold, followed by bronchitis and the physical signs of broncho-pneumonia. This time the response was the usual one seen under the age of one year and in striking contrast to the previous attack, namely a steadily mounting temperature, pulse and respiration rate (fig. 3). The same treatment was instituted as on the previous occasion, but without avail, and the illness proved fatal within a few days.

Summary

A case is recorded of a cretin aged eleven months, suffering from severe broncho-pneumonia and reacting subnormally; after resolution, and response to thyroid, a further attack of broncho-pneumonia ensued, producing the usual severe reaction, which ended fatally.