

THE NURSING OF SICK CHILDREN.

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IV.—SURGICAL NURSING.

OUR little patients, with their restless, heedless ways, as a matter of course must at times fall into the Surgeon's hands; and, moreover, the many constitutional diseases, inherited from sickly or tainted parents, will, especially among the poor, place their offspring in the Surgical Wards of the Hospital. Some of the greatest triumphs in modern surgery have been won among these little ones, and the Surgeon who has the gratification of saving some important limb, and thus placing the child in a favourable position to earn its bread, will be the first to acknowledge the share that good Nursing claims, in bringing about that result.

There is this difficulty to contend with, in the first instance: the child is not ill in himself, so that his natural love of movement, and high spirits, are in perpetual antagonism to the enforced quiet and immovability of his treatment; these have to be overcome, and brought into complete subjection before the Surgeon's skill can have fair play. I have no hesitation in saying that, for a child so circumstanced, condemned to a long confinement in one posture, no place is like the Hospital Ward: there, he is amused by the companionship of children in like misfortune, the routine and work of the Ward breaks the monotony of the treatment, and his attention is diverted from himself and his ailments, by the change and interests around him. He is no longer the centre of a circle of sympathising relatives, nor is he master of the situation, as he must be of necessity in his own home. A Home Hospital for such patients would meet a long-felt want.

A Nurse, in dealing with a surgical patient, must be ready with appliances and suggestions for keeping the patient in one position; this is an essential in good Nursing. The patient cannot be reasoned with, or scolded into keeping himself lying down; he will forget his promises in five minutes, and, if he is perpetually told that he is a naughty boy, for only following his nature, his moral consciousness will get confused, and the result will be irritation all round. When a child has some disease in the joints, or spinal disease, he must, perforce, be kept at rest, and that for months, or even years, and this means absolute rest, not only lying with the legs up, and the rest of the body on the move, but the whole body so fixed that the inflamed joint cannot move. It is

the business of the Nurse to arrange this with as little discomfort to her patient as possible, that is, by leaving such parts of the body free, notably, the arms and hands, as will enable him to amuse himself, whilst lying down. A plan that has stood the test of years is to make armlets, joined by a broad chest-band; underneath the back, and through the underside of the armlets, is passed another broad band, long enough to fasten to each side of the bedstead, with strong tapes; the whole apparatus should be made of stiff webbing, about an inch and a half wide, and may be covered with any pretty soft material that fancy dictates. A child, so fastened to his bed, is very fairly maintained in the recumbent position, and when splints or weights are attached for the treatment of the diseased limb, he has but little purchase for their displacement.

It is a matter of surprise to those unacquainted with sick children, how readily the little ones—even babes under one year—adapt themselves to this constraint, and amuse themselves, feed themselves, or do needlework in this posture, and so remain, with no injury to their general health—that is, so long as they have all hygienic requirements—until the Surgeon says they may get up. The secret of this is, that the Nurse has begun her discipline with the patient at once, and has shown, by her gentle, yet firm manner, that thus he is to lie, until she has orders to get him up. At the same time she shows, by her sympathy and readiness to promote his comfort and happiness, that she is no tyrant, but has his best interest at heart. The bed for a surgical patient should be a firm hair-mattress, and no wider than is required for him; a long board the size of the bedstead, called "a fracture board," will, in some cases, be needed to make it quite level. The diseased limbs will require individual adjustment, according to the nature of the affection; but it is essential, in all cases, to give them efficient support, by the use of sand-bags, or soft pillows, for the muscles are inclined to act involuntarily, or over-actively, when there is inflammation in a joint—the start in disease of the hip-joint, followed by the scream of pain, is a familiar instance. The persistent contraction of the muscles also has to be dealt with, as the aim of the Nurse will be, not only to set her patient on his feet, but to stand him level on his two feet, with as little deformity and stiffness of the joints as she can bring about by her diligence.

Unfortunately, when a patient is in a chronic condition, his Nurse has a tendency to become chronic likewise, and to content herself with cleansing, feeding, and amusing him; but so much may be done now by rubbing, manipulating, galvanising, &c., to maintain the vitality in the limbs, and make them serviceable when required,

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