into a milky fluid. Its duct opens, as I have said, close to that of the liver. The office of the spleen, which lies under the left ribs close to the larger end of the stomach, has been much discussed, but it takes no direct part in the digestion of the food. It has no duct.

There are a great many diseases of the liver, and in common with most other organs it is subject to inflammation.

Inflammation of the liver, or *hepatitis*, may be either acute or chronic, and both forms are more common in warm climates than here.

Still a large proportion of the diseases in our Medical Wards are complaints of the liver of this or some other kind.

There is in acute hepatitis usually pain in the right side, feverishness, difficulty of breathing, vomiting, and cough, and the patient finds himself unable to lie on the left side.

The pain, which is sometimes sharp, sometimes dull, extends occasionally to the top of the right shoulder. There is often a difficulty in deciding whether the seat of the inflammation is in the lung or liver, and a Nurse must be most accurate in detailing every symptom to the Physician which may come more particularly under her notice.

Abscesses often form in the liver, and its substance is subject to changes of different kinds—morbid degenerations as they are called. Sometimes there is a great increase in the size of the liver, sometimes diminution. Intemperance tends to generate diseases of the liver, and there is one which is known by the name "gin drinker's liver."

Inflammation of the liver is sometimes accompanied by *jaundice*.

The striking features of jaundice are the yellowness of the skin and of the eyes, whitish fæces, and urine having the colour of saffron, and communicating a bright yellow tinge to linen. This yellow colour is supposed to be owing to the presence of the colouring matter of the bile in the blood.

It is alleged that jaundice is occasionally caused by fits of anger, fear, and of alarm, and it has been noticed as having been prevalent after a continuance of very hot weather.

All diseases of the liver require particular *medical* attention. I need hardly say they also demand good nursing; but they are not dependent on it as a rule in the same kind of way as sufferers from intestinal maladies. You must remember one thing, however, that liver complaints are generally attended with distressing depression of spirits, and that a Nurse has much in her power, besides administering the prescribed remedies, to contribute to her patient's care, by cheerfulness and patient consideration.

It has already been mentioned that the *lacteals* perform the duty of carrying off the chyle from the alimentary canal to the thoracic duct. These lacteals form only a division of a system of vessels pervading the whole frame, which contain a fluid called lymph, and are called *lymphatics*. The office of the lymphatics is to carry the lymph, which appears to be a part of the waste material still available for nutrition, to the *thoracic duct*.

The thoracic duct begins in a receptacle below the diaphragm, where it receives all the lacteals, and the lymphatics from the lower part of the body. After proceeding through the chest, at the side of the spine, and towards the neck, it terminates in the junction of the two great veins of the arm and head, on the left side of the neck; the lymphatics of the right side of the upper part of the body open into the corresponding vein of that side. These openings are protected by valves, which prevent the blood from flowing into the lymphatics.

There are four principal organs of excretion, or means by which the refuse matter, which cannot be employed in the nourishment of the body, is cast off from it. One of these, the skin, we have already considered. The excretion from the intestinal canal we have also mentioned. There now remain to be spoken of the kidneys and the lungs.

There are two kidneys, one situated on each side of the spine in the lumbar regions of the abdominal cavity. They are slightly larger, though in shape similar to the kidney of the sheep. The function of the kidney is to separate from the blood by a filtering process some saline matters, a compound called *urea*, and water. Urea, if not removed from the blood, is highly poisonous. Its principal ingredient nitrogen is derived from the waste of the tissues, and from the excess of animal food. Its quantity, therefore, is influenced by causes operating on these sources of supply; and so long as the kidney acts healthily, and is not overtaxed, it is an important safeguard against the accumulation of unrequired material in the system.

It must be remembered that all excess in eating and drinking excites the excretory organs—especially the skin, the liver, and the kidneys—to unnatural efforts; and the consequence of want of moderation must be, sooner or later, first, functional derangement, and then structural change.

The Latin name for inflammation of the kidneys is *nephritis*. Many of its symptoms closely resemble those of colic, and its treatment is also somewhat like it. Nephritis does not often arise of itself, if one may use the expression, but generally accompanies some disease, it may be of the kidney or of some other organs.

previous page next page