

Lectures on Elementary Physiology in relation to Medical Nursing.

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LECTURE IV.—THE EXCRETORY ORGANS.

(Continued from page 43.)

IT is important to remember that after the infectious fevers, such, for example, as scarlet fever or measles, and especially the former, patients are exceedingly liable to suffer from acute congestion and disease of the kidney substance, due to some slight and accidental chill. The skin is especially sensitive to external impressions after these fevers; probably in consequence of the inflammatory disease which has weakened its structure; and, consequently, it becomes of the utmost consequence in all cases, but especially so when the patient is a child, to guard against any sudden chill, for a fortnight or three weeks after the fever has disappeared. It can easily be understood why the kidney is affected when one remembers, for example, the manner in which the skin and the kidneys, so to speak, relieve each other in working; that acute inflammation of the one frequently shows itself as a precursor of disease in the other; that, as in scarlet fever, when the outer skin is so destroyed as to peel off in large flakes over the greater part of the body, the kidneys exhibit an extreme tendency to similar inflammation; and that shedding of the cells of the tubes of the kidney takes place. The two processes, in fact, are curiously analogous—the epithelium of the kidney swelling up, losing its functional powers, and being thrown off, just exactly as the epidermis of the skin is exfoliated. The need therefore of care in the attendance upon such patients is in nothing more clearly shown than in the prevention of a chill. It is a fact, indeed, that in some patients acute inflammation of the kidney occurs after an attack of scarlet fever, even although the patient has not suffered from any evident "cold"; but these cases are comparatively rare. The chance of the chill is greatest when the patient first gets out of bed, and when therefore he is, as a rule, weakest, and is consequently most susceptible to any external influences. It is a valuable precaution even in hot weather, and especially so in winter, to clothe a patient recovering from scarlet fever in flannel or woollen clothing. If baths are ordered for the purpose of assisting in the

desquamation, or removal of the flake, the water should always be maintained during the bath at the same temperature; and on being assisted out of the bath, the patient should immediately be wrapped in a large well-warmed bath towel, and, when dry, have a flannel nightdress put on. Or, again, if the Nurse is ordered to rub the skin with olive oil, this, especially in cold weather, should be well warmed first, so as to prevent any chilling of the surface by its application. Draughts from doors or windows are especially dangerous, and should, therefore, be most carefully guarded against. In private houses, the patient should be kept in bed and completely covered up, whilst the room is being "aired." Many a case of fatal kidney mischief, and many more of dangerous lung trouble, have followed an attack of scarlet fever, because the patient was allowed too soon to sit by an open window.

It should always be remembered that after all attacks of fever, whatever be the nature of the illness, the patient's bodily health is more or less depressed, and his ability therefore, to recover from disease is diminished whilst his tendency to contract disease is increased. The remarks which have been made, concerning the care of a patient after scarlet fever, apply with almost equal force to the attendance upon those convalescing from any other infectious fever.

If, however, despite all precautions, the patient has an attack of renal inflammation, he may become feverish and complain of a heavy weighty feeling in the loins. At the same time, it will probably be found that the urine becomes scanty in quantity and high coloured, and may appear to be red or even black, owing to the fact that a greater or less quantity of blood transudes with the water from the overloaded blood vessels of the kidney. To a certain extent, this represents Nature's effort to relieve the congestion of the organ, and in moderation it may even have a beneficial effect.

Immediately such symptoms present themselves, they must of course be reported to the doctor, because it is then certain that acute inflammation of the kidneys has commenced. Sometimes, indeed, the congestion of the organs is so extreme that the urine is completely suppressed, and the patient at once begins to suffer from signs of uræmic poisoning, of which the meaning has been already explained.

(To be continued.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)