

Night Terrors in Children.*

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TREATMENT OF NIGHT TERRORS.

GIVE a dose of calomel to begin with and repeat it once a week, and prescribe some saline aperient daily, such as carbonate of magnesia with rhubarb or cascara added, or the bicarbonate and sulphate of soda with cascara to quicken it if necessary, giving the dose always twice a day, and after meals. An excellent prescription for the purpose is

Magnesia Carb. ʒvi.
Spir. Ammon. Aromat. ʒii.
Pulvi. Rhei. gr. 24.
Spir. Chloroformi ʒi.
Aquæ Ment. : pip. ʒvi.

The dose being one, two, or three teaspoonfuls, according to age and the effect produced. Another useful formula is

Soda Bicarb. ʒiii.
Sodæ Sulphatis ʒvi.
Spir. Chloroformi ʒi.
Aquæ Ment. : pip. ʒvi.

The dose as before, twice a day. If necessary, aromatic extract of cascara may be added to quicken the aperient effect.

Occasionally, if the nervous symptoms are severe, it is advisable at the outset to give a full dose of bromide at bed-time. This may usually be discontinued when the bowels begin to act satisfactorily, and the excitement subsides.

THE ESSENTIAL POINT IN TREATMENT.

The essence of successful treatment in these cases is to secure a free and full action of the bowels, with soft semi-liquid stools every day, without break or intermission; and this can only be effected by the daily administration of a laxative. Occasional doses of aperient once or twice a week are ineffectual; the evil is only temporarily removed, and accrues again in the intervals.

No strong purgatives should be used, or bowel tone will be eventually impaired, but saline laxatives, with the addition of the milder vegetable aperients, such as cascara, rhubarb, or senna if required.

I insist upon these main points since I

find that they are very commonly neglected in practice.

As a rule, the child is given an occasional purge, and steadily dosed with bromide, which only temporarily relieves or masks the disorder; or iron and tonics are prescribed, which in the engorged condition of the digestive tract and impaired excretion of waste, serve to make matters worse; they aggravate the liver trouble, increase headache, and coating of the tongue; and lessen appetite instead of improving it.

A few weeks ago I was consulted with regard to a boy of four, who suffered from the affection in its most extreme form. The night distress was so severe, and the after excitement and dread so great, that it had been thought advisable to take him from his family and place him apart, with a trained nurse, under conditions of absolute quiet and rest, and close watching. This produced some amelioration of symptoms so far as the general excitability and day fears were concerned; the night terrors, however, continued to recur as before.

I found that the boy had a heavily-coated tongue, and offensive breath; that his appetite was bad, and that he suffered from habitual obstinate constipation—that the bowels rarely acted without medicine, and that he was troubled by so-called "heat spots," lichen urticatus, a symptom specially associated with bowel inaction.

The patient had been given an occasional alterative purge—always with advantage—and bromide and tonics steadily. The general result being that the digestive organs remained completely disordered as before, and no real progress was achieved.

Under systematic treatment on the lines I have laid down, the bowels soon began to act daily and efficiently, the tongue cleaned, the appetite returned, the eruption disappeared, the night terrors became less intense and before long disappeared, the childish fears were gradually forgotten, and in the course of a few weeks the boy was well.

Let me remind you again, however, that although gastrohepatic disorder with constipation is the most common source of night terrors, they are occasionally due to mental excitement. It has been stated that these explosions in some instances herald the advent of meningitis or epileptiform seizures; no example of this, however, has come within my personal knowledge.

* A lecture by Dr. Cheadle, delivered at St. Mary's Hospital.

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