

Lectures on the Nursing of Lung Diseases.

By BEDFORD FENWICK, M.D.,
Late Senior Assistant Physician to the City of London
Hospital for Diseases of the Chest.

INTRODUCTORY.

IN various ways, the Nursing of patients suffering from diseases of the chest is of a more special character than is the case with those suffering from diseases of the abdominal organs. It is one of the drawbacks of the present system—or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say, the present want of system—of nursing education that special instruction is rarely given, in ordinary lectures on nursing, with regard to this subject.

In a previous course of Lectures upon the nursing of patients suffering from Heart disease, attention was drawn to the special care required from those attending upon such patients; and it will be the chief object of the present course to show that diseases of the Lungs require equally careful attendance. In some respects, the latter are more satisfactory to nurse, because so much more can be done for their relief or cure.

In diseases of the Heart, it may be said, in general terms, that unless a patient is seriously ill from organic mischief, he will probably not require a nurse's care at all. The various functional disorders of the Heart, as a rule, yield rapidly to medicine and appropriate diet and exercise; and, at any rate, they are not fatal nor serious enough to confine the patient to bed. But when the disease is sufficiently grave to disable the patient it is, as a general rule, such as to render a fatal termination sooner or later inevitable. And this depressing outlook being always present to the nurse's mind, naturally destroys the element of hope which both to medical men and nurses is the greatest incentive to continued and strenuous efforts to save life or alleviate suffering.

On the other hand, as we shall see for example in an ordinary case of Pneumonia, or inflammation of the lungs, life and death often hang in the balance upon the accurate carefulness with which the medical directions are carried out by the nurse. It may be said, indeed, that in this and other diseases of the lungs efficient nursing is of the first importance; and the nurse, on her part, can cheerfully strain every endeavour, feeling in, perhaps, the majority of instances, sanguine of her patient's final recovery.

In previous courses of Lectures, the writer has found it advantageous to commence by striking, so to say, the keynotes of the nursing required; and throughout the whole course to show that these recur again and again in many instances. So, in the nursing of Lung diseases, he would impress upon his audience the cardinal necessity of PURE AIR. Just as in the nursing of surgical wounds, absolute cleanliness is the essential rule, so the antiseptic system, in its universal application, enforces the lesson that diseased lungs, above all things, require clean air. Whatever, then, the nurse in these cases is compelled by the force of circumstances to do without, in the way of appliances, she must invariably provide for the constant and efficient purification of the air which the patient breathes. This golden rule holds good whether the temperature of the air be cold in certain cases, or whether it has to be warmed by appropriate measures, in others.

The next essential in the nursing of these cases is to maintain the action of the skin; because physiology teaches us that, to a large extent, the outer skin relieves the inner skin of the lungs in its work of removing waste material from the body; and so cleanliness of the surface is a potent means of assisting the lung, embarrassed in its action by disease, by relieving it of a certain part of the work it performs—that is to say, the exhalation of vapour. If the skin does not act, the lung is overworked to remove the superfluous moisture of the body; if the skin perspires freely, the lung is relieved to a corresponding degree. If the skin is not cleansed carefully, its pores become clogged and their activity, and therefore their usefulness in the excretion of moisture, is proportionately diminished; and the same injury is caused by any chilling of its surface. CLEANLINESS AND WARMTH of the skin are, therefore, the next requisites, which must be always kept in mind in the nursing of Lung diseases.

Finally, in every case of Lung disease, proper feeding is essential; and a strictly regulated dietary, accurately carried out by the nurse, in many cases not only means the proper maintenance of the patient's strength, but, as we shall see hereafter, it often makes all the difference between comfort, good digestion, and recovery, on the one hand, or indigestion, and therefore bad nutrition and decadence, on the other.

(To be continued).

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)