

The Nursing of Children's Diseases.

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LECTURE II.

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We can pass now to the more active diseases and accidents which occur in the abdominal cavity in children, and amongst these we may give the first place to *Intussusception*. This consists of a piece of the small intestine making its way into the succeeding and lower part of the bowel, just as a finger is put into a glove. Hence there is caused a more or less complete block to the passage of its contents through it. It is the most frequent cause of obstruction of the bowel in a child, and is due partly to the great mobility of the intestine of an infant and partly no doubt to an irregularity in the normal movements of the bowel. Constipation and sudden movements are said to help its causation. It occurs chiefly in children under a year old. It begins suddenly with violent abdominal pain, causing continuous kicking and screaming, followed by vomiting, which also continues at intervals, and straining efforts, which usually result in one or two forced evacuations, and then nothing but blood and mucus. These attacks occasionally subside for a time, but recur in paroxysms. The temperature usually remains normal. On examination of the child's abdomen, there may be occasionally felt a swelling of a sausage shape, which is the distended and distorted bowel. In a few hours, if relief is not obtained, the child becomes collapsed, as evidenced by its anxious expression, sunken eyes and cold skin, and finally it dies. If a child shows any of the initial symptoms above described, a doctor should, therefore, be at once sent for, because careless or ignorant treatment at this stage often does infinite harm. In a few cases of this kind inversion of the child and taxis of the tumour, or inflation of the bowel *per anum*, has been attended with success, but in the large majority of cases abdominal section is necessary, and the percentage of fatal cases is always very high.

When vomiting occurs all food should be stopped; anyhow till the symptoms are relieved

as it only tends to increase this symptom and exhaust the patient; the food is not likely to be digested and will probably be returned as given. For the pain and distension of the abdomen, hot compresses may be used over the part, and if required, belladonna and glycerine may be painted over the abdomen, before these are applied; this will relieve the pain by tending to lessen the spasm of the intestine which causes pain. On no account should purgatives be given; they cannot act as the bowel is obstructed and will tend to produce vomiting or increase it if present.

Opium if given will tend to allay symptoms, but this is a dangerous drug for children and should be stopped at once if any marked effect such as contraction of the pupils is noticed. If belladonna is given either internally or as a paint over the abdomen it should be stopped if it cause dryness of the mouth, dilatation of the pupils or a marked rash on the skin as these are signs of poisoning.

If an operation be done to relieve the obstruction, the after-nursing is that of such operations in adults, paying special attention to any symptoms of collapse that may appear and may call for the use of stimulants; and also to the feeding which must consist for a time at least of milk only given every hour or every two hours in small quantities at a time and iced to prevent vomiting occurring. Absolute rest is most essential. If the operation be recovered from it is most necessary for some time to be most careful with the diet and to observe carefully the motions in order to prevent any recurrence of the symptoms or inflammation of the bowels occurring; and it is most necessary that the bowels be kept freely open, as constipation may lead to a recurrence of the symptoms or other serious intestinal mischief.

Acute Peritonitis.—This most fatal disease is not uncommon in childhood, and may be secondary to some other disease, especially of the intestines. The symptoms may be very obscure and very often are so indistinct that the disease cannot be diagnosed during life. Vomiting is frequent, and consists of food, bile, and contents of the intestine, which are never faecal except there be intestinal obstruction. There is often diarrhoea at the onset, followed by constipation, but wind is usually passed by the bowel. The abdomen is very tender, at first chiefly in the region of the umbilicus, but later on the tenderness is general, except the

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