

The Nursing of Children's Diseases.

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LECTURE IX.

DISEASES OF THE LIVER.

The liver, which has been already alluded to in a description of the alimentary tract, is a very important organ, weighing in the adult from three to four pounds, and in a child it is relatively larger than this. It is lodged in the upper part of the abdomen chiefly on the right side. Its use in the body is:—

(1st). To manufacture from the blood the greenish yellow bitter fluid called bile, which is poured in to the upper part of the intestine, and there assists in the digestion and absorption of fat; much of the bile is absorbed from the bowel into the blood and thence passing back to the liver, is used over again; the rest passes down the intestine, stimulating its contraction, and so acting as a natural aperient; and prevents decomposition of the intestinal contents, owing to its being antiseptic; the colouring matter is then slightly altered in composition, and eliminated partly by the stools to which it gives their colour and partly is absorbed by the blood, and so colours the urine. Hence, if the bile be absent from the fæces, they will be pale and clay-coloured, and offensive, while, owing to the loss of the natural purgative, the bowels may be constipated, or occasionally owing to the initiation of putrefactive changes in the intestine there may be diarrhoea; also the fæces may contain an excess of fat, this not having been properly digested in the upper part of the bowel.

(2nd). The liver acts upon and splits up the peptones derived from the albuminous foods taken, during which it forms a body called urea which is an important constituent of the urine.

(3rd). The liver is also a store-house of sugary and starchy foods, which are transformed into a kind of insoluble starch called glycogen, which is given out to the blood slowly as it is required for the use of the body. If this glycogen be given out irregularly, or in large quantities into the blood as sugar, then it is discharged by the kidneys and a condition follows called diabetes.

Jaundice or Catarrhal Jaundice is due to bile

finding its way into the blood owing to catarrh with swelling of the bile duct, or to a swelling of the mucous membrane of the upper part of the small intestine into which the bile duct opens, which blocks the opening of the bile duct and preventing the natural escape of the bile this fluid filters into the blood.

The symptoms begin with dyspepsia, and the skin and conjunctivæ become yellow, the urine is dark coloured, owing to the presence of bile pigments, while the stools are pale and clay-coloured and there is often constipation. The child feels languid, the appetite is bad and the tongue furred. The jaundice lasts as a rule about a week, and then slowly passes off. A purgative such as Carlsbad Salts or Friedrichshall water should be given at the outset, and the diet should be light, consisting of milk and milk puddings, bread and milk, and beef-tea.

A little rhubarb and soda will be probably prescribed. The child need not be kept in bed, but may be confined to the house for the first day or two, and then allowed out of doors if the weather be mild. Occasionally jaundice in children occurs as epidemics and in these cases there is often vomiting and fever.

Now and then, after jaundice has lasted for a week or two, the child begins to vomit and get delirious at night, may have convulsions and bleeding from the nose or mouth, with a purpuric rash on the skin; later coma comes on, and finally death occurs. These are cases of acute yellow atrophy of the liver and are fortunately very rare.

Sluggish Liver. This term is often familiarly applied to instances of children who suffer habitually from constipation with pale motions. They are not positively ill, but are languid, and look sallow and out of health. They may be peevish and irritable. The appetite is variable and the tongue never quite clean, occasionally they suffer now and then from severe headaches. In the care of these cases diet plays an important part, the child should be kept from over-indulgence in sweets or cake, the meals should be regular, and feeding between meals discounted. The bowels should act thoroughly at least once daily, and Carlsbad Salts or some saline aperient may be given if necessary. Plenty of fresh air and exercise is of great importance. Sometimes a tonic such as hydrochloric or phosphoric acid may be useful, but this of course must be left to the medical attendant.

(To be continued.)

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