

The Nursing of Children's Diseases.

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LECTURE X.

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM.

Infantile Paralysis more properly called acute atrophic paralysis chiefly occurs in children under three years' old and is a fairly common disease. The cause of it is unknown.

It may begin with slight fever and febrile symptoms and occasionally convulsions, but sometimes paralysis is the first symptom noted. This paralysis which gradually increases for a few days as a rule, may be of one or more limbs or only parts of a limb and is now and then accompanied by excessive tenderness of the part, but usually sensation is not affected; when the paralysis has reached its fullest extent it may remain stationary for a time ranging between a week and a month or two, during this time the muscles are limp and flabby and quite powerless and some show signs of wasting; after this period is passed an improvement sets in, some muscles completely recovering their strength while others remain weak and waste more and more, this improvement may continue for about six months and ends by many muscles recovering completely while others waste. In this way owing to the weight of the limb and the contraction of the unopposed healthy muscles a paralysed part assumes an unusual position which may be followed by a permanent deformity, the most usual one being a drawing up of the heel and extension of the foot owing to a paralysis of the muscles in front of the leg.

The affected limbs grow more slowly and the joints become abnormally loose, the circulation is impaired and the limb has a blueish aspect and feels cold to the touch; while chilblains are common. The treatment of such cases is of the greatest importance, in the first stage to arrest the inflammation of the spinal cord, and later on to keep the muscles in as good condition as possible and prevent the occurrence of permanent deformity. The child must be kept in bed, on a milk diet, till all acute symptoms have passed away. After this period the nurse should apply systematic

rubbing to the affected parts for a quarter of an hour night and morning, the hand being oiled to prevent undue friction and pain, this may be preceded by tepid or cold bathing, the object of this is to stimulate the circulation and the general nutrition of the skin and muscles. Besides rubbing, the limb should be gently kneaded in order to act upon the deeper muscles. It is very important that the parts be kept warm with cottonwool in infants, or stockings or woollen clothing in older children. The child should be encouraged to make what use it can of the limb, and if the leg be affected it is often useful to place the child in a go-cart which supports the body, while the legs are used to propel it about the room. Electricity in the shape of the constant current is often recommended to exercise the muscles occasionally and prevent their wasting from disease; this is very apt to frighten children, and therefore requires much patience, only the weakest currents being used at first, and after some applications an increase of strength can be made. In some cases it is necessary to use some spring or elastic apparatus to prevent the occurrence of deformities, by taking the place of the paralysed group of muscles, and to keep the limbs in a natural and useful position.

Nerve Paralysis. Sometimes an infant is noticed to be unable to move one or other arms and occasionally in such cases the paralysis has dated from birth but has not been noticed for some weeks, this may be due to stretching of the nerves or other traumatism during the birth of the child.

In older children especially those who have learned to walk, the same paralysis may be due to the child being supported or dragged along by its arms, this injuring the nerves to those limbs. In both these cases the treatment merely consists of bandaging the limb to the trunk with the forearm semi-flexed across the chest for a week or two, after which the power of movement will generally be found to have returned. It is most important, however, that the nurse call a doctor's attention to the trouble as it is simulated by many other conditions, for instance, fractured clavicle, separation of the extremity of the bone of the arm from its shaft, infantile scurvy &c., produce a similar powerlessness of the arm and require different treatment.

Pseudo Hypertrophic Paralysis is the name

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