

Annotations:

ACCIDENTAL POISONING.

We recorded last week the death of a patient at the Stanley Hospital, Liverpool, after the administration by a nurse of a dose of caustic soda in mistake for the magnesia ordered.

The following evidence was elicited in the course of the subsequent inquest:—

1. *By the Ward Sister.*—That the aperients and cough mixtures, as well as a bottle of caustic soda and a lotion for dressing wounds, were all kept on the same shelf, the bottles being similar in style and appearance and labelled in the same way. The bottle of magnesia and that of caustic soda were practically alike, and the smell of the solutions only slightly different. She was not certain if caustic soda was a poison. It was possible for the magnesia bottle and the caustic soda bottle to get together on the shelf, or be moved about, as there were no special places assigned to them.

2. *By the Nurse.*—She was told to give the aperient to the deceased and to another patient. She went to the medicine pantry, which was poorly lighted with gas, and thinking that she knew where the magnesia bottle was, picked it up without looking at it particularly. She ought to have read the label.

3. *By the Dispenser.*—Caustic soda was not on the schedule of poisons, and she thought it not necessary to affix a red label. If she had thought it possible that the caustic soda could "have got" among the other bottles, she would probably have put it in a green bottle with a red label.

Given a Ward Sister who does not know that caustic soda is a poison, and allows it to be kept on a shelf with aperients and cough mixtures, a nurse who administers medicine without looking at the label, and a dispenser who in no way indicated the dangerous character of the drug dispensed, the almost inevitable result is tragedy. We referred last week to the incomprehensible contention of the *British Medical Journal* that a knowledge of *Materia Medica* is not necessary for nurses, and its statement "surely it is beyond their province to be acquainted with the dosage, properties, and methods of preparation of every drug which it is their duty to give but not to order."

Here is a case in point. Had *Materia Medica* been included in the educational curriculum of this Sister she would have known, to quote Miss Dock, that "caustic potash is very powerfully corrosive. . . . It differs from

nitrate of silver in extending its action far below the surface. . . . In cases of poisoning by caustic potash, the corrosive action is seen about the lips and fauces in bloody oozing, sloughs of mucous membrane, and vomiting of shreds of sloughing and bloody tissue. Deformity of the mouth and contraction of the œsophagus, and of the cardiac and pyloric orifices may remain after recovery, interfering mechanically with nutrition, and resulting in death after periods of time varying from six weeks to one or two years." No one with a knowledge of these "properties" of caustic potash would venture to keep a drug of this class with miscellaneous medicines. We hope in the light of this case our contemporary will reconsider its recent *ulcase*. Those whose business it is to handle firearms should understand their danger, and, equally, those whose duty it is to take charge of and to administer dangerous drugs, should know their properties.

THE HYGIENE OF SCHOOLS.

No one possessed of any olfactory nerves who has been in the habit of visiting public elementary schools can fail to be impressed by the fact that the system of ventilation employed in the large majority of such schools, leaves much to be desired.

The Austrian Society of Hygiene has recently promulgated some resolutions as to the hygiene of schools. The pavilion system is stated to be the best for all purposes; floors should be covered with linoleum; at the end of every hour windows should be opened and the air renewed. Indirect diffused light should be adopted, being admitted from the left preferably through high windows with milk glass panes. It is also laid down that every school should have a bath, and a room where the children can deposit wraps and umbrellas. No teacher should be allotted more than fifty pupils.

A medical officer should be appointed to every school, whose duties should include the prevention of overwork, the instruction of the children in simple principles of hygiene, the examination of teeth, eyes, ears, and throats.

Care should be taken to have seats and desks constructed on correct anatomical principles, so as to counteract any commencing scoliosis, rachitic deformities, and myopia.

The promotion of physical training, gymnastics, and open-air walks is also advocated. Altogether, the Austrian Society of Hygiene seems desirous to ensure that children shall be educated in a wholesome environment, and on sensible lines.

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