

## Lectures on Elementary Physiology, in relation to Medical Nursing.

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### LECTURE V.—THE NERVOUS SYSTEM.

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**I**T is always important to avoid contradicting such patients, because by want of tact in this respect much unnecessary brain excitement and therefore injury can be caused. Nurses, who were devoted attendants in every other particular, have sometimes minimised the effect of their services by permitting some tactless discussion with their patients, and especially by contradicting some harmless but erroneous impression which the patient for the moment happened to hold. Few cases in the whole field of nervous diseases require such care and attention, such patience and forethought, as these patients, suffering from gradual failing of brain power, need. And, at the same time, such care is often well repaid by the patient being thus rendered more happy and comfortable than he would otherwise be, the final issue being thereby postponed, it may be, for weeks or months.

These are the cases so well-known to medical men, and probably to managers of Private Nursing Institutions, in which one nurse after another fails "to get on with the patient," excellent as they may be in technical skill and experience. Nurse after nurse is sent back to her Institution after a few days' work, not because she has failed in her duties, but merely because her presence seems to irritate the patient, and so works more harm than her ministrations can do good. When the cause is inquired into, carefully, it is almost invariably found that the nurse has not realised the peculiar mental condition of her patient, and his or her extreme hypersensitiveness to external impressions. And it is often the case that a nurse with abundant tact, but perhaps little technical knowledge, succeeds in pleasing and satisfying the patient after many better qualified women have failed to do so. These are the cases, in fact, which test, more than any others perhaps, the tactfulness of the nurse, and it may be said with confidence that anyone who succeeds with patients suffering from softening of the brain, or indeed with other brain disorders, will be

successful with any other kind of private patient.

This point is emphasised because, on the one hand, excellent nurses have often been seriously, but quite unnecessarily, disheartened by finding that they failed with such patients; and because, on the other hand, it illustrates the great importance of "Tact," in private nursing. It is not only that the patient himself must be satisfied and soothed, but the feelings of his relatives and friends are usually in a state of troubled tension, which necessitates the greatest care and thoughtful consideration on the part of the nurse.

When these patients become bedridden they evince the extreme tendency—to which we have seen other sufferers from nerve diseases are liable—to the formation of bed-sores, and therefore they require the special care and attention in this matter upon which stress has been already laid. So long as it is possible, therefore, such patients are usually moved every day from the bed to a sofa, and their position is frequently altered to prevent injurious pressure.

It is also important to remember that these patients are very subject to attacks of congestion of the lungs, due to insufficient activity of those organs. With the dulling of the nervous system, the necessity of deep respiration is not experienced as keenly as in health, and so the breathing is often shallow and insufficient, and the lungs become inactive and overloaded with blood. It is therefore of importance that these patients should, when confined to bed, be well propped up with pillows, so as to prevent, as far as possible, the collection of blood at the bases of the lungs, due to the effect of gravity, and to which, therefore, the description of "hypostatic" congestion is given. It is, however, always a matter of more or less difficulty to maintain the patients in this position, because they tend, by their weakness, to be constantly slipping down in bed. It is in such cases as these, that the Gorham Bed, which can be inclined to any angle, is of such special advantage; and, failing this, it is often useful to pass a doubly-folded sheet under the patient's thighs and tie the ends to the upper part of the bed, so that he is practically supported by an artificial seat in the bed; the sheet, if necessary, being rendered more comfortable by being made to support a pillow upon which the patient sits.

*(To be continued.)*

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