

The Nursing of Heart Diseases.

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CHAPTER I.

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The lymph canals grow larger as they pass upwards through the abdomen and chest and finally join together to form a large channel known as the Thoracic Duct, which opens at the root of the neck on the left side into the left jugular vein, just as the latter unites with the left subclavian vein which returns the blood from the left arm, the united vessels merging directly afterwards into the great vein which empties the venous blood—and as we now see, also the lymph—from the body into the Right Auricle of the Heart.

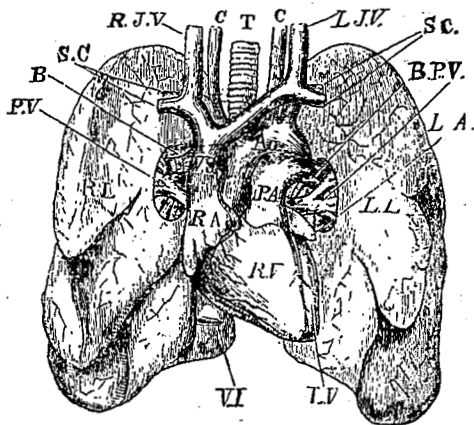


FIG 3.

The Thoracic Organs and Blood-vessels.

R.L. and L.L., Right and Left Lung; R.A. and R.V., Right Auricle and Ventricle; R.J.V. and L.J.V., Right and Left Jugular Veins, joining S.C., Subclavian Veins; P.V. and P.A., Pulmonary Vein and Artery; L.A. and L.V., Left Auricle and Ventricle; V.S. and V.I., Vena Superior and Inferior; A.O., Aorta; T., The Trachea, and B., its Bronchi; C., The Carotid Arteries.

The lymph is prevented from returning from the vein into the lymphatic canal by the same anatomical arrangement, at the point of entrance, which has been already explained in the case of the opening between the Auricles and the Ventricles, namely, valvular curtains which, opening inwards, permit the free passage of the fluid, but by their closure prevent the return of the blood or lymph.

There are two matters which require careful explanation before the details of the practical Nursing of diseases of the Heart are considered. The first relates to the diseases to which the muscular wall of the heart is liable; because,

as we shall see hereafter, these involve the greatest dangers to which the patients in question are liable. Secondly, there are the diseases to which the Heart's valves are subject.

The muscle of the heart may briefly be said to suffer from two distinct affections, *Hypertrophy* and *Degeneration*. The former term implies a thickening and enlargement of the muscular layers, which increase the size and weight of the organ, sometimes to a very great extent, and which, as a general rule, must be regarded as the effort of Nature to increase the power of the heart in order to overcome some obstruction or difficulty caused to its action by disease. Degeneration of its muscle, on the other hand, is the most serious affection to which the Heart is liable, because it involves a weakening of the strength of the organ, and therefore a diminished power of supplying the whole of the system with the blood requisite for its continued existence.

Generally speaking, Hypertrophy is shown by an increased force of the apex beat on the chest, and of the pulse at the wrist; while the patient often complains of palpitation due to his increased sensation of the heart's movements. Degeneration is also often accompanied by palpitation, but this is then due to the irregular action of the organ caused by its weakness. The muscle of the heart, when degenerated, is softened or broken down, and thus its elasticity, or contractile power, is diminished or altogether lost. The most ordinary form of Degeneration is that which is known as "fatty"—the muscle fibres being converted into fatty tissue. This is usually the result of some disease in the valves or blood-vessels of the Heart itself, or in the constitution of the Blood, either of which prevents the muscular tissue from being properly nourished. It was formerly believed that this form of degeneration was most common in fat people, but, although in such persons there may be an extra amount of fat deposited on the heart and between the layers of its muscular bands, actual degeneration of the muscle is not necessarily present, while the latter is found amongst patients who are unusually thin in consequence of continued ill-health. For example, as the writer showed some years ago, this form of degeneration is very often found in patients who are suffering from ovarian tumours, and in their case is the cause of sudden death.

(To be continued.)

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