

The Nursing of Children's Diseases.

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LECTURE XI.

THE SKIN AND ITS DISEASES.

The *Skin* consists of two layers, "the epidermis," which is composed of horny scales, and is insensitive, and serves as a protection to the true skin or "dermis," which is composed of connective tissue, and contains numerous blood vessels and nerves. The sweat glands are little coiled tubes opening on the surface of the skin. The sebaceous glands are most numerous on the head, where they open close to a hair, which they nourish and lubricate. If the skin be hot, dry, and pungent there is frequently fever, and while the skin remains hot and dry the temperature is likely to continue, and perhaps rise, but when sweating comes on the fever usually abates.

In collapse the skin is perspiring but cold; in rheumatic fever there is a peculiar acid smelling perspiration; in children suffering from tuberculosis the skin is often dry and scaly, and covered with abundant downy hair, especially over the back.

The skin has power to absorb various matters applied to it; and this is taken advantage of in the application of certain drugs; for example, a very useful way to give mercury to a child is by inunction; that is, the rubbing in of a mercury ointment into the tender skin of the axillæ or groins. Again the application of this ointment over the abdomen covered by a flannel bandage is a common treatment of tubercular peritonitis. It is important to remember that an application to the skin may be absorbed and perhaps cause toxic symptoms; for instance, the application of belladonna to relieve pain locally may be followed by the appearance of a rash, dilated pupils, rapid pulse and delirium, symptoms due to its absorption.

The skin may be acted upon to cause excessive sweating in order to reduce fever or to throw off some poison, such as those substances which should be excreted with the urine and which are retained in Bright's disease. To excite sweating the room should be warm and the patient clothed in flannel and covered by blankets; if a more marked action be desired,

a Turkish or dry air bath may be given or a wet pack, while the patient is encouraged to drink plenty of fluid, preferably hot. Sometimes certain drugs are given to assist the external applications. More details of this treatment, and also of the method of reducing fever by external applications have already been given.

The skin of the Infant is more delicate than that of the adult, and so is more easily irritated and inflamed, or its condition varies with the health of the child, becoming rough and harsh in many wasting diseases to which infants are liable. The skin is a highly important organ in a child, and any neglect is liable to cause some lesion. The first principle is absolute cleanliness, as most children perspire much, and this, if not removed, produces irritation and inflammation; plenty of bathing and the use of a powder will often avert this. Warmth is also very important, and the legs and arms should of course be carefully covered with light and loose, but warm clothing.

Burns are divided into those which are merely superficial and cause a blister, which is only a separation of the epidermis from the true skin beneath, by fluid which has exuded from the blood vessels. These leave no scar, and are not important except they are over a large surface, in which case "shock" may cause death; the second variety of burns are those which have extended into the true skin; these are severer, and on healing leave permanent contracted scars, formed by the fibrous tissue which has taken the place of the burnt skin.

The first treatment of a burn is to protect it from the air by covering it with oil or a simple ointment, or if that be not at hand it may be dredged with flour and covered with cotton wool; this will help to exclude the air, which causes great pain and increases shock. This "shock" is severe in extensive burns, so much so that perhaps no pain may be felt; in such cases the patient should be at once put to bed between hot blankets, and given some hot milk containing brandy. The after treatment of burns is usually to wash daily with an antiseptic solution to prevent sepsis, and to keep covered with lint spread with an antiseptic oil, such as weak carbolic oil, or a simple ointment, as boracic ointment.

Erythema.—This is generally applied to a simple redness or congestion of more or less

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