

Professional Review.

THE NURSING OF CHEST DISEASES.

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THROAT AND LUNG DISEASES.

The second part of this book deals with the Nursing of Throat and Lung Diseases, which are, the author points out more satisfactory to nurse than those of Heart Diseases, already described, inasmuch as more can be done for their relief and cure. In diseases of the Heart, unless a patient is seriously ill from organic mischief he will probably not require a nurse's care. At all, functional disorders of the heart not being serious enough to confine a patient to bed. When the disease is sufficiently grave to disable him, a fatal termination is, as a general rule, sooner or later inevitable. In many diseases of the lungs, on the other hand the nurse can feel sanguine of her patients' final recovery.

As in the Section on the Nursing of Heart Diseases we noted that the author laid down certain general principles of nursing to be observed in all cases, so, in that at present under consideration we find the keynote of the nursing required. The cardinal necessity of Pure Air is insisted upon in the first place. "Just as in the nursing of surgical wounds, absolute cleanliness is the essential rule, so the antiseptic system, in its universal application, enforces the lesson that diseased lungs, above all things, require clean air. Whatever then the nurse in these cases is compelled by force of circumstances to do without, in the way of appliances, she must invariably provide for the constant and efficient purification of the air which the patient breathes. This golden rule holds good whether the temperature of the air be cold in certain cases, or whether it has to be warmed by appropriate measures, in others. The next essential in the nursing of these cases is to maintain the action of the skin, because physiology teaches us that, to a large extent, the integument relieves the inner skin—of the lungs—in its work of removing waste material from the body; and so cleanliness of the surface is a potent means of assisting the lung, embarrassed in its action by disease, by relieving it of a certain part of the work it performs—that is to say, the exhalation of vapour. If the skin does not act the lung is overworked to remove the superfluous moisture of the body; if the skin perspires freely, the lung is relieved to a corresponding degree. If the skin is not cleansed carefully its pores become clogged, and their activity, and therefore their usefulness in the excretion of moisture, is proportionately diminished, and the same injury is caused by any chilling of its surface. Cleanliness and warmth of the skin are, therefore, the next requisites, which must always be kept in mind in the nursing of lung diseases.

"Finally, in every case of lung disease, proper feeding is essential; and a strictly regulated dietary, accurately carried out by the nurse, in many cases not only means the proper maintenance of the patient's strength, but, as we shall see hereafter, it often makes all the difference between comfort, good digestion, and recovery, on the one hand; or indigestion, and therefore bad nutrition and decadence, on the other."

Besides these general principles, which are of much value to a nurse in the performance of her work there are many golden practical hints to be found in these pages. For instance, concerning cases of croup we read: "In some children the attacks of vomiting are so frequent, that it is almost impossible to get any food retained. In these cases excellent results sometimes follow the application of a mustard leaf to the

pit of the stomach—the counter irritation relieving the irritability of the organ. In some cases again the white of an egg, with half a teaspoonful of brandy and some sugar, has an excellent effect—the mixture coating the inflamed stomach walls with a thin layer of albumen, which has a most sedative effect on the mucous membrane." Again:—

"It should be remembered that in all children, indeed to a less extent in adults, coldness of the hands and feet during the progress of an illness, is a practical sign of much importance; for it shows that the heart's action is not as strong as it should be. This symptom, therefore, should always be reported to the doctor, who will probably order appropriate stimulants; but the nurse can help in preserving the bodily heat and saving the child's strength, by placing a hot-water bottle to its feet and extra clothing on its bed."

With regard to the administration of alcohol the author lays down the axiom that while the quantities of alcohol which the medical practitioner considers necessary in the particular case will, of course, be exactly defined "the nurse should remember that the object being to maintain the patient's strength, it is better to give small quantities of alcohol frequently than to give a larger amount proportionately less often. The reason of this is very simple and should be always remembered. Alcohol acts as a stimulant, a stimulant to the nervous system, and thus as a stimulant to the heart's action. But its effect is followed by an exactly proportionate re-action, and therefore is merely temporary. At the same time, the full value of the stimulant will obviously be better obtained if it be not followed by too great depression. It is, therefore, a good general rule in cases of illness to minimize the reaction, and so increase the effect of stimulants, by giving only small doses and repeating them with corresponding frequency."

In relation to the nursing of children we read, "it is a practical point of great importance that in children, even more than in adults, the mental condition of the patient has the greatest influence upon the course of bodily illness. In some children, for instance, suffering from what appears to be extreme asthma, but which is entirely of nervous origin, the effects of some simple counter-irritant is often remarkable. Placing the child's feet and legs in hot water containing a handful of mustard will quickly cause reddening of the skin, and will draw a certain amount of blood from the deeper tissues, thus relieving to some extent congestion of the throat and chest. But the beneficial effects of the tingling of the skin is often out of proportion to the local result. The child will probably become absorbed in the temporary discomfort to its feelings, will watch with curiosity the process of drying the reddened surface gently with a very soft towel, and will thus be led to forget its throat irritation, and may, apparently, be suddenly cured of the difficulty of breathing."

These are but a very few points extracted from a book which contains many more of equal value. In concluding this short review I should like to commend the book to medical students, as well as to nurses. There is no doubt that students of an earlier school, when the nursing of our hospitals was not so well organised as it is at the present time, gained a rough and ready experience which stood them in good stead in their subsequent career, this knowledge the present day student will do well to acquire otherwise.

M.B.

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