

Lectures on Anatomy and Physiology as Applied to Practical Nursing.

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INTRODUCTORY.

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With regard to Nursing, there are two great principles which it will be well that the nurse should always remember. The first is, that *Nature attempts to remedy every accident or disease*. Sometimes, as we shall see, she succeeds admirably; sometimes she fails altogether; but, in every case, she makes the attempt, and it is upon "the healing power of Nature," as the ancients wisely called it, that medical men chiefly rely. In fact, most of the efforts of medical science are, at the present day, bent upon the discovery of the precise methods by which Nature attempts to effect a cure of the various injuries or diseases to which the human body is liable. When these methods are discovered, every effort of practical medicine or surgery, and therefore every effort of practical Nursing, is directed simply and solely towards assisting Nature's work. In brief, then, this fact explains the absolute necessity why nurses who desire to carry out their duties, not only with intelligence and interest to themselves, but for the patient's welfare, must understand something concerning the Anatomy and Physiology of the human body as applied to Nursing.

The second great principle should always be regarded as a golden rule in Nursing, and may be thus briefly defined. *The first great methods in the cure of disease or injury are CLEANLINESS and REST*. As we proceed with these lectures, we shall see these essentials exemplified again and again, but for the moment it is only necessary to remember how many diseases are now known to be due to Dirt—using that as a generic term to include uncleanness of every kind. As we shall see later, it is almost possible to go two steps further; and to say that so far as Surgery and Obstetrics are concerned, the first essential is Cleanliness, while in Medical cases, Rest is the first desideratum; and that Cleanliness may justly be held to be the active duty of the nurse, while Rest is the more passive part which is played by the patient.

It would, consequently, follow that the former is the chief part of good nursing, and no excuse need be made for emphasising this fact. Great and deserved credit is ascribed to the introduction of antiseptics into surgical practice; but it is now generally admitted that the value of their use was formerly much exaggerated, and

that it is to the greater care and cleanliness which was thus induced, rather than to the poisonous effect of carbolic acid upon putrefactive germs, that the splendid surgical successes, which have since been achieved, are really due. Indeed, operators, who are rigorously particular in the sanitary surroundings of their patients, but trust to soap and water rather than to germicides, obtain results much better than fell to those who, thirty years ago, pinned their faith upon the exclusion of bacteria by the creation of a poisonous atmosphere in which germs could not live. Antiseptics, however, will always be valuable when the results of Dirt have to be treated, and where existent bacteria have to be slaughtered by the million. But it should be remembered that just as Prevention is immensely better than Cure, so the maintenance of absolute *cleanliness*, so far as the patient and his surroundings are concerned—in other words, what is now termed *ASEPSIS*—is to be always aimed at, rather than *ANTISEPSIS*, obtainable by the routine employment of antiseptic lotions.

In like manner, a little reflection will convince anyone of the paramount necessity of *REST* in the treatment of disease or injury. How, for example, could a broken arm—however skilfully "set," or adjusted together, the fractured ends may have been—be expected to unite and grow strong again, except it were kept at perfect rest by means of firmly fixed splints? The object of stitching a surgical wound, again, is of course simply and solely to keep the edges completely at rest whilst Nature joins the severed tissues firmly together as they were before. And medical treatment teaches just the same lesson. The ulcer in the stomach or the intestines must be freed, as far as possible, from the irritation of its surface caused by indigestible food, and the movements of the organ must be lessened, if the open wound is to have any chance of healing—in fact, Rest is the first step to Repair. When we come to consider the condition of any inflamed organ—the heart, the lungs, the brain, or the kidneys—we shall see again and again that the first necessity is to set the inflamed tissues at rest before any relief can be afforded.

The acquisition of knowledge of any science is like the building of a great house. Both are impossible unless a strong, wide, solid foundation is first obtained. So, in our science one searches for such great basic principles as those above defined—which will explain the facts with which we meet, enable us to theorise from the known to the unknown, and guide us at every step in our practical work for humanity.

(To be continued.)

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