

Nurses as Health Missioners.

THE CORRECTION OF AN INJURIOUS HABIT.

It is a curious thing that so many nurses pass through the whole of their training without receiving any real instruction, and very often without any knowledge concerning the bad habit of masturbation (excitement of the generative organs) practised by so many children. Like so many other injurious habits, it is only when practised to such excess as to affect the general health and become almost a disease, that either a doctor is consulted or a trained nurse called in.

This being so, even some medical practitioners say that it is not nearly so prevalent as is supposed; but I have reason to believe that it is an exceedingly common practice among boys of all ages from the wee babe who is only old enough to control its little hands to others of every age. Nor is it confined entirely to boys—little girls, big girls, as well as adults, succumb to it with disastrous results morally and physically unless it is checked in the early stages.

As trained nurses are becoming year by year greater factors in the sphere of preventive medicine, it seems that here is a very important point concerning the national health which should no longer be ignored, and every nurse should arm herself to combat what is becoming a national evil. She should be so well prepared that whenever opportunity occurs she can warn the mothers of children and children's nurses of the seriousness of this habit and the necessity of checking it before it has obtained too strong a hold.

So little notice has hitherto been taken of what many people now consider the small cause which creates so much harm that so far as I am aware there is no literature dealing with the subject; a passing reference here and there, and certain little tracts written especially for boys and young men, but nothing further.

Very often the primary cause of the habit is some slight irritation around the genitals; in boys it may be the result of a long foreskin and the need of circumcision, want of cleanliness, amusement, or proper occupation. In little girls thread worms are often the original cause. As it is somewhat difficult to ascertain if a child has contracted this habit (for, like most evil things, it is practised by stealth—when at stool and in bed), a very careful watch must be kept, so that as far as possible conclusive evidence is obtained. I hope no one would ask a child if he does nasty things, and so put bad seed into a pure child's mind.

But should the child be discovered with its nightdress up and its hands between its thighs, at once measures should be taken to check it; if the child is very young a smart tap upon the hands, remarking at the same time, "Naughty, naughty," in the severest tone possible, may often be sufficient to nip the trouble in the bud; but should it be persisted in, then it would be wise in the case of a boy to consult a doctor. The usual signs which accompany this bad habit are general irritability, puffiness and darkness about the eyes, swollen genitals, constant wriggling, wetting the bed, great desire to be left alone, and, when the habit is of long standing or very acute, albumen and blood may be found in the urine.

How can it be prevented or overcome? In the first instance, before the habit is well established, gentle measures with simple explanations of the wickedness of it, and that it will lead to very serious ill-health, may be quite sufficient to stop it; in other cases corporal punishment may be necessary. But should the habit be well established before it is discovered, additional means must be used, always, of course, appealing to the reason and best instincts of the child, with explanations of the very serious consequences which will surely follow the continuance of the trouble. The diet should be carefully supervised, all animal and richly spiced foods, etc., strictly avoided; eggs, fowl, fish, and an abundance of milk should be given. The general health must be improved by every hygienic measure possible, such as daily warm baths before going to bed and a cold sponge in the morning.

In the case of sensitive, nervous children the morning sponge must be reduced to cold gradually, and the child should be allowed to stand in warm water until the cold water no longer frightens or upsets him.

There must be plenty of interesting occupation and amusement found for him, with a constant change of both, so that the child does not get bored or thrown upon his own resources. Physical exercises, walks, outdoor games, and as much fresh air indoors day and night as possible, so that he is thoroughly tired out every night, and when put to bed sleep comes on at once. No unhealthy excitement or games should be allowed; tickling and such like fun absolutely prohibited.

In very severe cases it is sometimes necessary to restrain the child during the night by means of soft straps on wrists and ankles, allowing sufficient movement to turn from side to side; the child should not be allowed to lie upon the back, as this increases the desire.

No tight clothing should be worn, and boys

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