

In olden days our predecessors used to treat all fevers with calomel in heroic doses, and there can be no doubt that this was often very useful. Nowadays we are apt to sneer at old fashioned remedies, and calomel has certainly suffered from its history, but there can be no doubt that given in small doses, say half a grain every four hours, it is of great value in clearing the system of those toxins that can be eliminated through the alimentary canal.

Another and very satisfactory way of eliminating toxins is by the skin and kidneys, washing them out as it were. For this purpose the patient is given large quantities of water, or thin barley water by mouth—at least five pints in the twenty-four hours. After a short time he perspires profusely, and also passes quantities of clear urine. In severe cases the saline is given subcutaneously, about two pints being allowed to run into the loose tissue in the axilla or beneath the breasts. In desperate cases the solution may be given intravenously.

Another way is to act on the skin by baths, which may be tepid in ordinary cases but preferably hot in children or weakly persons. There is often considerable prejudice even amongst educated persons against the use of the bath in feverish conditions, but there can be no doubt as to its efficacy.

Lastly we endeavour to assist the white corpuscles in their fight against the invading organisms. For this purpose we give the patient as much easily assimilated food as he can digest. Often milk is the best form of food, but very many persons cannot digest it even when it is diluted with water, soda water, or barley water. As a rule it is not advisable to give meat extracts in pyrexial conditions on account of the extra strain which they throw on the kidneys, but they are sometimes useful in stimulating the appetite when given occasionally, and in small quantities. On the question of feeding, it is well to remind ourselves that the toilet of the mouth is a most important factor, not only with regard to the appetite of the patient but to his digestive capabilities also. In all pyrexial conditions, the mouth is apt to get dry and septic, and it is essential that it should be kept clean. In most cases brushing the teeth frequently with a solution of peroxide of hydrogen followed by washing out of the mouth with any pleasant mild antiseptic solution is all that is necessary, but it must be done thoroughly.

Then we can increase the quantity of the leucocytes in the patient's blood directly by the administration of nucleinic acid. This is best given in capsules, about 4 grains per diem

being the usual dose, but it may be given hypodermically in urgent cases. How this drug acts we do not know precisely, but its administration is followed in favourable cases by a large increase in the white blood corpuscles, and by an improvement in the patient's general condition. It is of most use in pyrexia from local lesions, such as a suppurating joint, or an appendicular abscess.

Lastly we have to consider the means to be employed when we wish to reduce the temperature because the blood is getting too hot for the patient's nervous centres. For this purpose, there is nothing to equal plain water. We try first tepid sponging; if that fails we put the patient into a cool bath, which is almost always successful. Failing this, we rub the patient with lumps of ice. Antipyretic drugs are useless in small doses, and dangerous in large quantities. Water is best.

VENEREAL DISEASE.*

THE BLACK PLAGUE.

By DR. HENRY MOORE,

*Surgeon to the Westmoreland Lock Hospital
and the Royal City of Dublin Hospital,
Dublin.*

I would wish first to thank the President and Council of the Irish Nurses Association for the great honour they have done me in asking me to read this paper before you, and secondly, to congratulate them on bringing forward this most important subject—a subject of ever increasing vital importance to the present and future generations.

In the name of common sense, why is nothing done to check the spread of venereal disease? What are our legislators doing?

Are we as a profession altogether free from blame for their inaction?

It is true that legislation cannot make a nation moral any more than it can make it sober. But has the disappearance of the Contagious Diseases Act from our Statute Book made the nation more moral or diminished the spread of disease?

To both these questions I unhesitatingly answer no.

Why should scarlet fever, which claims its few hundred victims in the year, be notifiable, and venereal diseases, which claim their thousands, pass unnoticed?

* Read at the Nursing Conference, Dublin, June 4th, 1913.

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