

far more to be pitied than one who has lost some of his limbs in an accident, or has had his face badly burned, or has suffered from the disfiguration of small-pox.

Sight, in short, is man's most precious sense. His organs of hearing and of smell are far less developed than those of many lower animals. Thus he cannot hear and smell as a cat can hear and smell, but, although there are animals which have exceptionally acute vision, the visual apparatus of man, taking into consideration the extent of his visual field with the two eyes looking straight forward as they do, his appreciation of perspective and of colour, and, lastly, the situation of his end-organs of vision at the top of the upright body, is developed to an extent which is found in no other animal.

I have said enough, perhaps, to call your attention sharply to the importance of the subject in hand. Let us turn to some practical points.

Picture to yourselves a newborn infant suffering from that dread disease *ophthalmia of the newborn*. Those of you who have had maternity training will know about it. It is a contagious disease of the membrane covering the eye and lining the eyelids. This membrane is the conjunctiva. You are called upon to nurse the case, and you find the eyes streaming with pus. Damage to the eyeball itself may or may not have already occurred, but in any case it is exceedingly apt to occur, and especially if the case be insufficiently or improperly attended. If ever there is an opportunity of doing good work, conscientious work, and at the same time rather difficult work, here it is. The future welfare of this small member of the community mainly rests upon *you*. The doctor may come and go, but, I repeat, the case mainly depends upon *you*, upon your appreciation of its gravity and urgency, and upon your unremitting care and conscientious attention. The child is not in danger of his life, but he is in imminent danger in very many instances of becoming blind before he has learned to see. Now I would have you remember that *ophthalmia of the newborn* leads to lifelong blindness only too often, not because it is an incurable disease, not because the family doctor or the ophthalmic surgeon cannot prevent this result in most cases, if he sees the child soon enough, but just because of neglect. Sometimes, unfortunately, the children of the working classes are neglected from sheer badness of the parents, but this is not by any means always so. The neglect may be due to *want of knowledge* of the danger on the part of the parents or the attendants. *You* cannot help the neglect of

parents, but if the case should come into your hands you must leave nothing undone that should be done to prevent the previous neglect having its full and terrible consequences. Without a knowledge of the danger of the disease, without a knowledge of the appearances presented by the corneal ulceration which brings about perforation of the front of the eye and probably blindness, how can a nurse properly attend to such a case? And if this kind of contagious *ophthalmia* is dangerous in infants, it is even more so in adults, though in a lifetime of work you will see but a few cases.

It is perhaps in this eye disease more particularly that so much depends on the skill of the nurse, but there are many others in which her knowledge of the specialty and her trained hands count for a very great deal, and in which she may become specially proficient. I should be most glad to think that anything I have to say would tempt a greater number to learn this specialty, and so lay us all under a further debt of gratitude to your profession.

I have two more pictures to show you before I finish with this part of the subject.

The first is that of a middle-aged person who is being led up the doorsteps of an Infirmary or of a Nursing Home. He is able to distinguish between light and dark, and to see the moving shadows of objects close to him. He has a cataract in each eye, and the surgeon is about to remove one of them. All goes well, and in a fortnight or so this patient walks down those steps unaided.

The second picture is of a person with only one eye, who nevertheless has sufficient sight to walk up those steps unassisted. He has a disease of this one remaining eye which is progressive, and leading more or less rapidly to blindness. The surgeon has decided, probably after a great deal of balancing of the risks, that something must be done by way of operation to try to arrest the progress of the disease. For some reason the operation is not only without effect, but bad has become worse. In a few weeks the man whom you saw enter your doors unaided is led into the street permanently blind.

I have taken two rather extreme and yet fairly typical cases in order to point the moral. Why was the operation on the second case disastrous? I need not say to you that the fault may have lain with the patient or with the surgeon. The judgment of the latter may have been at fault in operating at all, or his technique may have been imperfect. The patient may have been unruly on the operating table, and have ruined his chances there and

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