

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF CHOREA, ITS MODE OF DEVELOPMENT, THE DISEASES TO WHICH IT IS ALLIED, AND THE NURSING CARE NECESSARY?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Dora B. Vine, Eversley, Exmouth.

PRIZE PAPER.

Chorea, popularly called St. Vitus' Dance, is a nervous disease of childhood, of which the characteristic symptoms are the jerky movements or spasms of the voluntary muscles (specially of the face and arms), or fidgets in an exaggerated form, accompanied by irritability, anæmia, and insomnia. It may occur with rheumatism or heart weakness, as the result of some mental shock (for instance, some painful experience or thoughts in an imaginative and lonely child, forced to repress her feelings), or it may arise from a definite accident to the spinal cord or cerebellum. It occurs more often in girls than boys, and ten is the most usual age, although six to sixteen is the danger period for nervous subjects.

There is also a form resulting from a toxæmia in pregnancy. This is by far the most serious. It requires most careful treatment in hospital, but the prognosis is never good.

Chorea from the nurse's point of view is one of the common diseases met with in every hospital, and to the earnest probationer every case should represent a serious responsibility and a precious opportunity. Chorea is so much a disease of the mind as well as the body—although, of course, all disease, being a form of evil, must perforce affect body, soul, and spirit—that the nurse must influence the *mind* favourably if a cure is to result. Very often a "chorea child" gives a nurse her first chance of exerting a definite influence on her patient as a means of treatment. In hospital these cases are screened; that fact alone makes many a new patient cry. Now is the chance for nurse to explain, to show how she can help in her own cure. This must be said with due care not to make the child self-conscious. All treatment must be explained as a means to an end—the great end, health—which must be represented as an attainable ideal. By a few words now and then while bedmaking, &c., nurse can sketch out the way the patient can keep her nerves healthy. It is never right to ignore these topics. Obviously (and this is true of adults too) the Ego is the one absorbing topic to every invalid, and if we repress all references, then the thoughts will not be checked, but simply

kept secret. It is the nurse's privilege to train these children's thoughts *on themselves* into healthy channels.

Regular habits are, of course, necessary, and plenty of light and air will do as much as any tonic. As long as complete rest in bed is ordered, the nurse must be careful to give the child's mind healthy occupation while avoiding any strain; she must encourage sleep by suggestion, simple homely means, and, of course, any special treatment ordered, such as electricity.

In severe cases care must be taken lest the patient injure herself during the spasms, and in pregnant patients the possibility of precipitate labour must not be forgotten. I once had such an experience, the child being born during a spasm with no warning whatever, surprising the mother (a primipara) as much as myself.

During convalescence the child should follow a graded plan of mental training. Unconsciously the brain must be taught to control its forces under various circumstances. A canary is a great aid at the right moment; the child learns to care for it, and at the same time the brain receives the impression of movement—jerky spasmodic actions without forcing the voluntary muscles to respond.

Nurses should give the mothers of such patients full detail as to convalescence, for that stage is generally completed at home, and if the movements recur owing to some temporary indisposition or fright, any kind of ridicule or punishment will not only bring on another attack of chorea, but will dishearten the child and affect her future.

In conclusion, mothers must learn to study their children. Nurses must study the temperament of each case, and endeavour to equip each for the battle of life, not merely by curing chorea, but by teaching the use of the weapon nature has provided, viz., the use and abuse of our wonderful nervous system. Incidentally, St. Vitus' Chapel at Ulm, in Suabia, was said to have been the birthplace of chorea, young women entering the chapel being seized with extraordinary spasms. Others say that St. Vitus gave relief to sufferers from chorea.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss J. G. Gilchrist, Mrs. Farthing, Miss Crouch, Miss A. B. Owen, Miss Winifred Nash, Miss F. Sheppard, Miss B. Mackenzie, Miss M. Bagelow.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

What are the causes of nasal hæmorrhage? and how is it treated?

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