

## HELIO THERAPY AS APPLIED TO THE CHILD.\*

BY DR. A. ROLLIER (LEYSIN).

*(Concluded from page 37.)*

It is to be hoped that popular preventoriums will increase in number. Poor children would specially benefit. Rich or well-to-do children can be sent by their parents to health resorts for the time needed to restore their strength, but the predisposed children of the poorer class are less favoured. To complete the work, these solar preventoriums should be combined with schools of agriculture, gardening, etc., which would give the former predisposed children of the poorer class an opportunity of learning outdoor work while continuing to fortify themselves in the air and the sun, and of becoming good agriculturalists. After leaving the preventorium, these children would thus avoid returning home to unhealthy workshops or factories, where they risk losing all they have so laboriously acquired. Let us recognise, however, that though much remains to be done, enormous progress has been achieved in the way of prophylactic sun-cure. In every country a movement is developing, more and more marked, in favour of the preservation of children by open-air life and sunshine. In France, among several others, admirable work has been done by Dr. Armand Delille, whose name must be mentioned whenever one speaks of preventive solar cure.

In Switzerland the idea has also progressed, and an entire lecture would hardly suffice to mention all that is being done in most of our large towns. We need only mention, quite near to us, the splendid organisations of the town of Geneva and the fine work at Vidy near Lausanne.

I think it right to remind my hearers that heliotherapy applied to children can only give good results if applied according to perfectly systematic rules. It is still too often thought that the sun-bath is the more efficacious the more it is prolonged and if taken at the time of day when the sun's rays are hottest. This is an unfortunate mistake, against which nature herself warns us. Although all kinds of creatures, vegetable and animal, require light in order to live, and plants in all latitudes turn towards the sun with tireless persistence, it is none the less true that many flowers close their cups when the rays become too hot. Most animals have an instinctive tendency to seek the sunshine during the cool hours of the morning, while they retire into the shade during the heat of the day. It is not slavish obedience to nature to take note of these facts. They should be a guide to people who indulge indiscriminately, at the risk of painful consequences, such as burning, giddiness, palpitation, pains, and congestion of the internal organs. It is to prevent such accidents that we have established rules founded on experience, from which it would be imprudent to depart.

The principle consists in always beginning the sun-bath with the lower limbs, which are less sensitive. This course is in a way a means of testing the endurance of the patient, after which a proper course of sun treatment can be settled on. This method is specially necessary with invalids; the air and sun bath applied in this manner constitute an efficient means of decongestion, and accidents are avoided.

We proceed then by graduated stages, increasing the exposure a few minutes each day, first the feet, then the legs, the abdomen, and the chest—the head remaining covered by a handkerchief, or better still by a white cotton sun-hat. The rate of progression must be slower as the trunk is reached. After a lapse of time varying with each patient, the power of the sun, the time of year, etc., the

body becomes pigmented and can safely remain in the sun several hours a day.

An essential precaution is to avoid the sun-bath during the mid-day hours, especially at the lower altitudes where the over-heated atmosphere is weakening and causes congestion, undoing the good effects of the solar radiation. During the hot months, therefore, it is in the early hours of the morning that the sun-bath should be taken.

The rules we have just stated are general principles which it would be well to adapt to each individual patient. It is obvious that with a patient whose state is precarious, increased precautions should be taken, whereas a predisposed or well child may safely proceed much faster. As a general rule, the air and sun-bath, to be of value, should always cause a feeling of comfort. The sick as well as the predisposed child should feel braced and strengthened during and after the exposures to the sun, which should never be prolonged unduly. Here also "enough is as good as a feast," and it is well to remain within the limits of wise moderation.

**Healthy Children.**

It is obvious that all we have just said about the sun-cure applies also to children who are well. The sun-bath, so efficacious with sick children and those threatened with illness, cannot but be beneficial to those who have health and wish to preserve it.

We may observe, moreover, that between the predisposed and the well, distinction is sometimes slight, for the organism of nearly every child is contaminated before puberty and called upon to resist the first onslaught of tuberculosis. In reality, if nowadays much is done for the clearly predisposed child, little enough attention is paid to those who are considered healthy. Reared in insufficiently aired apartments, imprisoned in non-hygienic clothing, the child is too often subjected to slow asphyxia both of the lungs and of the skin. Later, he is shut up and kept still in school during the important period of growth; his back is bent, his chest grows hollowed. Mental over-exertion retards his physical development and weakens his general state of health.

The children of the poorer class are still worse off. Though they avoid intellectual over-work, they have not like the children of the well-to-do class the opportunity of enjoying fresh air and sunshine after school hours, in hygienically-built dwellings. They return to unhealthy homes, deprived of sun, where in winter parents and children are bottled up in the vitiated air of the common apartment, most often the kitchen, to make up for the absence of heating.

To prevent their young bodies becoming a favourable ground for the development of disease, we must give an increasingly larger place to air and sunshine in the lives of our children. Not only in infant schools, crèches, orphanages, etc., but in the individual homes, in the city itself, and, above all, in the elementary school. In the city, certainly, great improvements have been introduced. The campaign carried on by hygienists in favour of open spaces where healthy children can exercise themselves and play games stripped to the waist, the laying-out of squares, of wide avenues planted with trees in all urban districts, has already created an irresistible current of opinion. It is the same with necessary housing-reform; we are beginning to realise that the old adage "the sun shines for everybody" must again become a reality, that the children of the poor must needs be removed from their habitual surroundings in unhealthy tenements, where consumption takes its toll, and given plenty of pure air and sunshine. At school a start has been made, but we have still far to go. The school, however, is well adapted to become a centre of instruction in hygiene and of anti-tubercular education. It is, in fact, in the ele-

\* A Report presented at the First General Congress for Child Welfare, Geneva. (Translation).

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)