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SOME PRACTICAL HINTS CONCERNING THE CARE OF NEW-BORN CHILDREN.

NOTES OF A LECTURE AT THE HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL.

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UNDER ordinary circumstances, the first thing to be done to the child is to clean it. Babies are born with more or less of that disagreeable salve-like matter sticking to their skins. Sometimes the whole body is covered with it; the hair is filled with it, and the eyebrows. Sometimes, on the other hand, it is hardly to be seen, except in the folds of the groins, in the axillæ, in the cleft of the nates, and about the neck; and in an occasional case you will find it only about the labia, if a female child, or if a male child, between the scrotum and the thighs. This substance, known as the vernix caseosa, does not seem to be any more or less abundant according to the healthful condition of mother or child. But it must be got rid of, or the folds and clefts will become sore. Water alone will not remove it, neither will any ordinary rubbing with soap. Oily substances will mix with it, with very slight rubbing, and the use of soap and water will then, with perfect ease, remove the mixture. Of late, I have very frequently advised the use of oil alone to clean the new-born child; no soap, no water; a little sweet oil rubbed in with a small bit of sponge; and as each part in turn has been oiled, and then wiped off dry with the towel, the child is as clean as if washed with soap and water. Many persons have an idea that unless soap and water be used the child cannot be clean. But oil is as clean as soap. The object of washing is to get rid of dirt, and it depends upon what the particular dirt is composed of, whether soap, or oil, or some other substance is the best thing to use for its removal. Alcohol has been substituted for oil to dissolve this substance, but the objection to its use is that it dissolves the oily matter from the child's skin, and also that it has the effect to chill the child. In either case, too much work would be thrown upon the lungs of the new-born.

The child being once made clean it is not necessary that it should have an entire bath daily. Its nates and other parts in the neighborhood should be bathed often enough to keep them clean, even if it be

with every change of napkin ; but to strip it, and in a cold day and in a chilly room to torment the little shivering child for a wash, according to an established daily rule, is simply a matter of cruelty.

One point you should give positive instructions upon: that is, the necessity for drying the skin of the child thoroughly before dressing. A good rubbing with the hand, after the rubbing with the towel, is agreeable to the child. A properly dried skin is more likely to escape the sore and cracked condition that young children are apt to suffer from. This cannot be prevented so well by the flesh-powder, the burned flour, or the powdered starch with which nurses are often so particular to dust the child. Indeed, you will find that these applications frequently become acid, and increase or even produce the troubles which they are intended to obviate.

The child should be warmly and in every way comfortably dressed. The still adherent umbilical cord should be sufficiently covered to prevent its soiling the clothing, and as a matter of cleanliness should be made short ; if it is not tied before the pulsations in it have ceased, there will be no risk of hæmorrhage from its cut extremity. I never would cut the cord till all pulsation in it was stopped. The open condition of its vessels is a safety-tube for the lungs and heart behind. Having cut it, there is no need of the huge wad of cotton lamp-wicking often wound about it. Indeed, if there were no ligature applied, it is very seldom that any dangerous bleeding would occur. The cord should be short, the ligature small, the covering ample ; and if the latter become offensive in a day or two it should be removed.

The first article of clothing put on is usually a flannel or knit swathe or belly-band. It is a very common mistake of nurses to put this on very tight, to prevent, as they say, "rupture of the navel," or to give the child's bowels support. It is as bad as tight lacing in the adult, or worse than that ; organs are compressed which require the utmost liberty ; the action of the lungs, and consequently of the heart, is interfered with ; the child cannot nurse, and you will occasionally be called in to see a "blue baby," not from organic trouble, not from an open valve, but blue and suffocating from compression, that might almost as well be about the neck ; and when you get to the house you will find perhaps a little half-suffocated child, whining, or rather moaning, too weak and too much straitened to cry. The herb teas and the spiced waters administered by the nurse have done it no service ; but the taking out of half a dozen pins from the belly-band stops the moaning, restores the color, and the child can both feed and sleep. Prevention is better and easier than cure. Strings on the belly-band are better than pins, if either be used ; but the best band requires neither, being broad, thick, loose, and elastic, woven or knit of good woollen yarn.