

GERIATRICS

The New Department of Medicine, Which Has to Do with the Treatment of the Aged
by Material Methods—"Death Takes the Quitters"

BY JAMES J. WALSH

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A last medical science has awakened up to the fact that special care needs to be taken of the old. There are now one-fifth more people alive above the age of sixty, it is said, than was the case a generation ago. The average length of life has increased about one-fourth, and as the average is greatly decreased by the excess of deaths under five, it is particularly because of much longer life than before that our mortality average has improved so much. Scientific medicine has been occupied for many years with the question of reducing the death rate among children. A special department of medicine, called pediatrics, from the two Greek words meaning child and healing, was established about half a century ago and a special chair created for it in all the medical schools. Those who know the statistics of the death rate among children will appreciate very well how much has been accomplished by this department. There are literally thousands of children alive now in our large cities that would not be alive if the infantile death rate of even twenty years ago had maintained itself.

Now medical science and, above all, medical education is coming to recognize that a similar benefit can be conferred upon mankind by the careful specialty of the diseases of the old. It has been too much the custom to think that old age must necessarily be associated with suffering and that the inevitable progress toward death, with its accompanying manifestations, must be accepted calmly without any possibility of much relief for them. A great change has come, over the scientific attitude toward old age, however. Metchnikoff, at the Pasteur Institute, calmly discusses the possibility of man living on to 120 or, perhaps 150, if only the disharmonies of life can be corrected. Distinguished thinkers in psychology have quite seriously discussed the question as to whether death may not really be a process of anticipation in human life because of the conviction that has come to so many minds that almost any affection occurring after sixty is likely to carry the patient off. Certain it is that by will-power men sometimes live long after physicians are ready to declare that death is inevitable. On the other hand, it is well known that death takes the "quitters" and that men who give up in such diseases as pneumonia or kidney disease do not last long. Tuberculosis, it has often been said, takes only the "quitters," and every man who will live in the early stages of the disease can almost without exception secure many years of life for himself.

Food, Rest and Air.

The great reduction in the death rate among children and the corresponding lengthening of life has come as a result of attention particularly to three things—food, air and rest. Overfeeding is only a little bit more serious than too little air or sleep. Sometimes the details with regard to these seem very trifling, but long ago Michael Angelo said, "Trifles make perfection, though perfection is no trifle." Certainly this may be paraphrased, both as regards the health of the young and the old. "Trifles make health, though health is no trifle." It is the food, its proper preparation, and especially care that there shall not be an excess of it; the amount of air, and watchfulness that there shall be an abundance of it, and the amount of sleep, and precautions to obtain the proper amount of it, that makes

all the difference between health and disease, which, after all, means only discomfort, though it may have serious consequences for the old as well as for the young.

What we have learned in recent years is the definite application of principles of treatment to the old so as to obtain these indispensable requisites to as great an extent as possible, and particularly to the degree required for the special individual, for, after all, it is a question, not of treating old age, but of treating old persons, each one of whom is very different from the others. It is only appropriate, then, that the new special department of clinical medicine should be called by a name analogous to pediatrics. Geriatrics—from the Greek geras (an old man) and iatrics (healing)—has been very properly adopted for it.

There are certain noteworthy differences between those who are beyond sixty and those who are in middle life as regards physiology, pathology, tendencies to disease and resistive vitality. This is particularly noticeable with regard to the two most important functions of animal life—eating and sleeping. Long ago Hippocrates declared in one of his aphorisms, "The old stand fasting much better than those of middle age, and those of middle age much better than the young." Children are very easily hurt by lack of food." This is the keynote of eating among the old. They need less food than in earlier years, and if they insist on eating as much as formerly they suffer from it. It is rather easy to understand the reason for this. They are not nearly so active as in middle life and their heat processes within the body are much lower. As a consequence they do not burn up so much fuel, and if the fuel continues to be provided in excess for this heat engine that the animal part of man is, it will not be long before the fire box will be clogged and before processes of various kinds within the body will be seriously disturbed.

Moderation in Eating.

Above all, it is important that long established habits of eating shall not be disturbed in the older years, especially in the direction of more abundant eating than before. Many a man who after a reasonably long life of simplicity in eating comes into conditions of life where dining becomes a function and a course of dinners and luncheons and breakfasts a routine suffers severely from it. It is in these cases literally that men sometimes "dig their graves with their teeth." Moderation in eating is of first importance for the old.

An extremely interesting story is told of the physician of the late Pope Leo XIII. and his arbitrary regulation of certain of the habits of the great pontiff. The Pope is said to have announced to his physician one day that he was thinking of getting a new set of teeth and that a dentist should be summoned for that purpose. Leo XIII. had been one of the most abstemious of men in the matter of food and had always done an enormous amount of work. His physician, well pleased with the state of the Pope's health, which enabled him to accomplish so much in spite of his years, naturally hesitated about the change in his diet that might come with the introduction of new teeth. He declared at once: "No, Holy Father, I shall not permit you to get a new set of teeth. We shall have the old ones repaired, but no more. You have been getting on very well with the old ones, and I have great fears as to what might happen to your old stomach because of the work that might be set for it by the new teeth."

The Pope did not get the new teeth. After eating, the most important factor for the retention of health in old age is sleep. Those above sixty need more sleep than they did in middle life, or at least need to spend more of their time in a reclining position. It is not absolutely necessary that they should sleep at

not when it is already fully developed, but twenty or forty years before, when the abuses in eating, drinking, working, and above all, worrying, were making themselves felt upon the arterial system.

It is extremely important that the old should keep up their occupations, so as to prevent occupation of mind with itself to a harmful degree. Men, like machines, will rust out sooner than they will wear out. Many a man at the age of sixty or less gives up his occupation in life, thinking that now it is time for him to take a rest, and finds before long that

own which it imparts to the old, lifting them up out of depression and despondency. Curiously enough, associations with those of mature or middle age have not so much benefit for the old. Often they emphasize the impossibility and incapacity for accomplishment which age more or less necessarily brings with it. When a man can help young people and be much with them, then his older years are likely to have more of happiness and health than under any other circumstances.

It has been found that it is extremely important for old age not to lapse into habits of inactivity. There is the temptation of a man well on in years to give up walking to a great extent, to ride in carriages and to sit in the house a great deal. What has been learned about the heart in recent years shows very clearly that unless it gets a certain definite amount of exercise it does not do its work as well as it otherwise would. At Nauheim, the greatest health resort for heart cases in the world, while the baths constitute the attraction, it is well recognized by the medical profession that the graduated exercise up the low grade hills which surround Nauheim which is always carefully prescribed constitutes the most successful part of the treatment. Stokes, the greatest of English authorities at the middle of the nineteenth century, insisted that even for fatty hearts gradually increased exercise is extremely important.

It is recognized now that the tendency of the old to drop into flesh is particularly unfavorable for them. Their obesity is due to a great extent to the inactivity to which their years predisposes them, but the accumulation of fat has had two bad effects. First, because of the weight it requires the individual to carry around it further discourages activity. Second, it accumulates around important organs, especially around the heart, though also in the abdomen, and hampers their activity. Great care must be exercised, then, not to permit the accumulation of fat. There is only one way to do this, eat no more than is required for the amount of exercise taken. Just as soon as the weight begins to go up beyond the normal weight for height there must be less eating and more exercise. Care must be taken not when the patient is already thirty or forty pounds over weight, but when five per cent more than the normal weight for height is noted. It is not hard to get a table that will show exactly what that is.

Difficult to Reduce Weight.

When older people have once put on weight it is rather difficult to take it off. Much can be done, however, by regular exercise and proper limitation of food. This need not mean that they shall be denied all starchy substances and most of the food products that they like best, but that everything that they eat shall be somewhat limited and that certain special fattening articles like puddings, cream and butter shall to a great extent be taken out of their diet. With regard to exercise they will probably need considerable encouragement. There are forms of exercise, however, that are particularly good for old people. Golf is one of these, walking, especially in company with a friend or friends, is another, and then in recent years the value of walking down stairs has been recognized. We probably owe the suggestion of this to some of the German specialists, but American experience has shown it to be a very valuable form of exercise in taking off weight from those who are pretty well on in years.

For older women (how much weaker the comparative is here than the position in their environment is the presence in the house with them of several unmarried daughters. They take all the responsibility off mother's shoulders and from going out in case there has been the slightest change in the weather and need to make arrangements by which

Exercise of Legs.

It has come to be realized very clearly in recent years that a great many of the pains and aches of the old, and especially those in the legs, are due more to inactivity than to any other factor. Old men who have to stand much suffer a great deal. As these pains and aches are worse in rainy weather, they have usually been set down to rheumatism. It has come to be recognized, however, that the word rheumatism should only be used whenever there has been an acute stage with fever and redness and swelling of joints. The other pains and aches are due to long use of muscles. Sometimes they are due to flat foot, often to enlargement of the veins of the leg, spoken of as varicose veins, sometimes to standing without any proper exercise of leg muscles. In the upright position the leg muscles are firmly contracted and the circulation in the thin walled veins is considerably hampered. Venous circulation is greatly helped by muscular contractions. Hence the necessity for walking downstairs and the like, which thoroughly empties the veins.

While the return circulation is most important in the legs, sometimes the direct circulation through the arteries is disturbed. The feet of the old rather easily become cold, and it may require a good deal of warmth to restore circulation. At the end of a long day if an old person lies down with cold feet they may cause wakefulness for several hours. Sir Henry Thompson, the distinguished English surgeon, who lived to be well beyond eighty and wrote a book on old age when he was past fourscore, had the custom of putting his feet for at least five minutes just before going to bed into water gradually made as hot as he could stand. This dilated the veins, brought a large quantity of blood down to the legs, and so prevented insomnia. After he had been out at a meeting or a dinner, or any other occasion that might possibly make him wakeful, he extended the time of this podivium and stood undisturbed for seven to eight hours afterward.

In general it may be said that all our advance in the care of the old has come from a greater attention to hygienic details of living. There must be full occupation of mind, considerable activity of body and attention to details of health in the matter of air, water, food and bodily exercise. These, with the definite persuasion that life by no means necessarily ends with the seventieth year and only accidentally with anything less than that, and in the words of Bismarck, that while mankind is persuaded that all the good things happen in the first seventy years of life there are many pleasures in the second seventy, there seems no reason why men should not live healthy and happy considerably beyond three-score and ten without necessarily incurring any of the unhappiness suggested by the Psalmist



Youth Has a Magnetism of Its Own Which It Imparts to the Old, Lifting Them Out of Depression and Despondency.

For some reasons, such as overwork in youth, the deteriorating effect of certain diseases, overstimulation of life, the abuse of stimulants, drugs and tobacco and the influence of heredity, some men develop hardening of the arteries prematurely—that is, much sooner than it should normally come. A man is literally as old as his arteries, and the arteries of these individuals have grown old before their time. There has been question of cures to be prevented, not cured. Oliver Wendell Holmes said that a physician could secure any disease if he only came to him in time, but that the diseases of many of his patients ought to have come for treatment in the persons of their grandfathers. Something very similar ought to be said of arterio-sclerosis. It needs to be treated

there is no rest for him in the sense of being satisfied with doing nothing, but that if he has been much occupied during the preceding years then for peace of mind for himself he must continue to have mental occupation. Some one once said, very well, we must occupy our minds with doing things or else they will do us. That is literally true.

After occupation of mind the most important preservative for the old is association with the young. Nothing so keeps a man from brooding over the troubles of life, and even impending dissolution, than occupation with those much younger than himself in which he is deeply interested. To a grandfather, finds the very best tonic for his vitality in intimate association with his grand children. Youth has a magnetism of its

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NORWAY'S FUTURE KING.

CHRISTIANIA, July 2.—Many flags were displayed in the capital today in observance of the tenth birthday anniversary of the Crown Prince Olav, who if he lives will some day become the king of Norway. The northern climate appears to have agreed with the prince, who has developed into a lively, robust youngster during his eight years' residence in Norway. Many persons profess to see in the features of the youthful prince a decided likeness to his maternal grandfather, the late King Edward VII. of England.

SOUTH ATLANTIC PRINTERS ORGANIZE.

AUGUSTA, Ga., July 2.—Delegates from the typographical unions of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina assembled here today to complete the organization of the Tri-State Printers' Association. The purpose of the new organization is to bring the members of the craft into closer alliance. Officers will be chosen tomorrow.

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