

MUNCASTER (M.)

The Importance of Pleasant
Medication.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PLEASANT MEDICATION.*

BY MAGRUDER MUNCASTER, PH. D., M. D.,
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I TRUST the society will pardon me for digressing from its usual custom of requiring an essay on some pathological condition or a clinical report of a case. This digression, however, does not partake of a subject that is alien to our researches, but, on the other hand, to one that is essentially allied to our best results through means which may be defined as "the easiest way is the best."

During ten years of active practice, all the while observing the marked advancement being made in scientific medication and taking into consideration the general trend for many years past to make the practice of medicine an exact science, I have reached the conclusion, with which I doubt not you will agree, that the era for pleasant medication is attained, or at least approximately so.

The ablest authorities have displayed no skepticism as to the best methods of obtaining scientific results in the employment of drugs. They have drawn their conclusions as to the merits of a drug after its active principle has

* Read before the Medical Society of the District of Columbia.

been isolated by the chemist, experimented with by the biologist, and tested in pathological conditions by the physician. This means for the elimination of the worthless drug and the adoption of that which is efficacious has advanced the science of medicine to its well-known high standing.

What the art of medicine was to the ancients, the science of medicine is to the modern world. The former was the acceptance of more or less vague idealities, while the latter is the application of known results. The present age receives with open arms all recognized scientific achievements. It welcomes progress, and sends to far and near the tried and accepted agents for the alleviation of the many ills to which mankind is the unwilling heir and frequent subject.

Solomon, while administering to his people from the storehouse of his proverbial wisdom, said that "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine." At that time he had access to the choicest balms of Gilead, and had offered to him nothing except what was good. While not reflecting upon the taste of a king, I do not believe that the best at that period would be accepted by the cultivated tastes of the present age.

No doubt many of us can recall to memory with a vividness bordering on actual taste the days when the anxious mother, concerned for the health of her child, before so bright and ruddy, but now grown pale and puny, would be compelled, under the direction of the family physician, to lay the child across her lap, and midst its kicking, crying, and screaming, and with perhaps the help of two assistants, administer that lingering nauseous dose of vermifuge made from oil of wormseed. Do you not taste it with a shudder even now, and remember it with a gag! In those days the ailing child would, if possible,

quietly steal away from home and hide when it saw the physician coming. The child grows to manhood, and there still clings to him the idea that all medicine is disagreeable.

As a friend of mine once said: When he was young, his mother kept on hand the customary herbs, roots, and barks, and made them into a vile and bitter decoction for everything in the way of sickness. He didn't mind being sick, but it was the fear of taking that bad-tasting medicine. He would rather hold on to a bad cold than have to hold any more medicine like that which he took in those days. All of you remember the old story of the boy who was importuned by his nurse to take his medicine, under the plea that "it was real nice and tasted so pleasant." He replied: "If it is so nice, why don't you take it yourself?"

In consequence of disagreeable medicine, people have frequently resorted to other means of alleviation and delays, to their detriment, in preference to seeking the aid of a physician. A medicine which is disagreeable, if given to a child at this age of enlightenment, except where there is imminent danger, would almost seem to amount to the "unusual" punishment that is forbidden by our time-honored Constitution.

Mothers have been heard saying to their children that "if you do thus and so I'll give you a teaspoonful of that medicine." Yet when the same child becomes ill that mother's heart wells to overflowing with sorrowful tears when compelled to add sufferings in the way of a medicine that makes the face writhe with disgust. Medicine is a corrective rod, and a good one, but it was never intended to correct morals. Medicine is Nature's remedy for physical ailments, and the physician is the director and instructor as to when and how and what kind to use. The moth-

ers, while careful lest they antagonize the will and direction of their long-trusted and intimately associated family physician, also have some rights. And, pray, who dares deny a woman her say! She should, however, abide by her physician's direction as to when and how and what kind of medicine should be administered in a particular case, yet at the same time, surely, she has a right to protest against a medicine in a disagreeable form when the same kind may be obtained in a palatable form.

Many of our regular physicians, apparently entirely from habit, prescribe medicines regardless of taste, and the patient submits. Yet does he submit? In many cases the answer must be No. The patient is ever on the alert with all his senses acute for a medicine that will cure his ailments and at the same time be pleasant to his taste.

Other schools of medicine are indebted to many of us for their patrons. The licentiate of those same schools, however, while ostensibly differing with us as to the theory of practice, adopts most willingly our most appetizing and palatable medicines, and reaps in a way the credit of his boasting.

Our schools of medicine can not impress too strongly upon the minds of their pupils the advisability and necessity of prescribing medicines that are agreeable to the taste of the patient. A fit motto to hang upon the doorposts of their practice would be, Prescribe only the medicines that are safe, quick, and pleasant. First, safe, because we are the trustees of the patient's body, and having assumed the trust, we are in honor and duty bound to do nothing that will affect their health or imperil their lives. Secondly, quick, because ill-health has as its retinue of attendants mental anguish to the patient, inconvenience to the man of business, and anxiety and bodily suffer-

ing to the household. Thirdly, pleasant, because the taste is within quick communication with the mind, and the mind is a potent factor in the alleviation of bodily ailments.

It is not less scientific to prescribe pleasant medicine, but, on the other hand, rather the application of our highest achievements. We are no longer tied to large doses of sulphur and molasses as an alterative, powdered cinchona as a febrifuge, scrapings of iron rust as a tonic, oil of wormseed as a vermifuge, and other similar drugs.

The general anatomy of the people has remained the same since the memory of man; their features and manners have changed, and but mark a higher degree of cultivation and advancement; their throats have not grown smaller, as has been said of the present whales as compared with the much-disputed one that swallowed Jonah; yet what would the people of to-day think if directed to take their pilular medicine in a piece of tissue paper to disguise the taste?

Not to us alone should be taken all the credit, however, for this era of scientific and pleasant form of medication. The untiring efforts of the analyst and manufacturing chemist have, by means of isolation and synthesis, placed in our hands medicines essentially active, efficacious, and palatable. Where formerly was administered a teaspoonful of nauseating medicine we now have as the best for the same purpose a minute tablet, compressed pill, pellet, parvule, or a minimum dose of a concentrated liquid.

The physician in the country is likewise benefited, for he finds himself able to carry the essentials of a drug store in his overcoat pocket without the slightest inconvenience. The necessity of his carrying medicines to patients is far more obvious than that of his brother practitioner in the city. In the country the patients are more or less far from

a pharmacy, and the consequent inconvenience and delays in obtaining medicines would otherwise be attended with serious injury to the patient. That the most scientific and pleasant forms of medicine are the most convenient to the country practitioner is a fact that not only keeps him abreast with the times but also enables him to prescribe intelligently and satisfactorily to his patients and to himself.

In the large cities, more especially, there are many practitioners who are now using extensively the palatable medicines that are prepared in a concentrated form from the active principles. Some of these practitioners are among the most eminent in the profession, having professional incomes from twenty five thousand dollars a year and upward, and they make a point of keeping in their offices from fifty to one hundred thousand tablets.

In our own city there are many of our most successful practitioners dispensing tablets and other forms of concentrated medicines. These same physicians will tell you that this system has not only been profitable but also gives greater satisfaction to their patients. The progressive pharmacists of to day keep in stock a complete assortment of this form of medicaments. Some physicians hesitate on that account to dispense any medicine. This, however, should not influence them, as this represents only a part of the medicines commonly used or prescribed.

My advice to the young physician, just beginning his career, is to keep on hand a well-filled case of tablet triturates. In so doing, as already intimated, he will find it not only more profitable, but that it will increase his office practice more than any other method known at the present time.

Again, I would have you consult with the patient rela-

tive to the form of the medicine that is to be taken. The sense of taste varies markedly. To some a bitter medicine is agreeable; some will only take sweets in a liquid or pilular form; some are unable to swallow a pill or a capsule from not having been taught in their childhood to do so; some can take anything and everything in whatever form it may be administered; and some veterans, not more progressive than their physicians, will take the vilest decoctions of bitter drugs, believing that the nastier the medicine the greater its power. In other words, I mean that the physician should not only diagnosticate the disease of his patient but as well his tastes, wishes, and peculiarities, whether mental or physical.

It is useless for me to attempt to show all the advantages of such a system to those who have adopted it in their practice, but I will simply mention an instance, that of a specialist, who informed me that it was about the only way he could hold his patients sufficiently long to cure them.

Those who seek the services of a physician nowadays and go to a young doctor, which they do sometimes, consider his habits, manners, general appearance, and most of all the character of his medicines—that is, his ability to prescribe scientifically and palatably.

I would not have you infer that it is best to treat solely the imaginations of the patients with placebos of saccharum lactis or with the vapors of aconite, belladonna, bryonia, or depend entirely upon Nature. It is our duty to make an accurate diagnosis in every instance, and this is possible in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred at the present day, and to treat them according to the latest scientific principles with agreeable medicines. In the few cases where it is necessary to prescribe a medicine that has a disagreeable taste, it is not a difficult matter at this stage

of our science not only to mask it in a harmless vehicle but also to make it pleasant.

At present we have the means within our power to dispel all unfavorable impressions in the minds of the young and the old, and make the proverb of Solomon the motto of the sick and the well to-day.

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