A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

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SPINAL CONCUSSION IN WARFARE CURED BY SUGGESTION

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THE INTEREST IN THE CASE described below is twofold, lying partly in the unusual nature of the injury, and in the complete cure effected within 48 hours of the patient's admission to hospital.

Naval gunner torpedoed and spine concussed

Able seaman, J.C., aged 23 years, was a member of a gun's crew during an action, in which our own and enemy light forces were concerned. A direct hit was obtained by the enemy on his gun, and all the crew but himself were killed. He was thrown to the deck unwounded, but on regaining his feet an explosion occurred, caused by a torpedo, and he was thrown into the sea.

He began to swim, and succeeded in regaining the ship which was still above water, but she sank within a few minutes. He jumped overboard before she went down and began to swim again; a dull explosion took place almost immediately, whereupon he felt a severe pain in his back and lost consciousness. He stated that he thought he heard other men in similar plight around him cry out just before he became unconscious, but recollected nothing else until he found himself on shore.

Hospital admission

On admission to hospital, the patient was fully conscious but quite unable to walk or stand.When placed in bed, he lay towards his right side with the thighs semi-flexed and the shoulders bent forwards. He was quiet, answered questions slowly in a subdued voice, and complained of persistent pain in his back.

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Examination

On examination, great muscular rigidity was found in the lumbar and lower dorsal regions on both sides, together with considerable tenderness on pressure. The pupils were somewhat dilated, and the deep reflexes increased; the pulse was slow and of good tension, and the temperature subnormal.

"That evening it was very strongly suggested that he would sleep soundly and wake in the morning with full use of his limbs and freedom from pain. On entering the ward on the Friday morning, I found the patient sitting up in bed anxious to be allowed to get up; he could walk as well as ever, and was absolutely free from pain or stiffness"

Treatment

I decided that a course of suggestion and radiant heat might be of benefit. A radiant heat bath was ordered that night and for the following morning, and I strongly suggested to the patient that he would be quite well on the Friday forenoon, two days from admission. He slept fairly well, and on the Thursday no apparent change had taken place in his condition; he was disinclined to speak, and the pain in his back had not diminished. That evening it was very strongly suggested that he would sleep soundly and wake in the morning with full use of his limbs and freedom from pain.

On entering the ward on the Friday morning, I found the patient sitting up in bed anxious to be allowed to get up; he could walk as well as ever, and was absolutely free from pain or stiffness. He was kept under observation for a while, and given 3i of Easton's syrup three times a day. Very shortly afterwards he left the hospital feeling perfectly fit.

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