

"Infirm of purpose ! Give me the daggers !"

I am a great admirer of Lady Macbeth though I am fully aware that her character is not faultless. She was not the sort of person, perhaps, to be trusted with the dissection of tuberculous glands from the neck, or of operating on a case of torticollis, but how splendid she would have been in the treatment of early spinal disease ! There would have been no half-measures with her !

### THE TREATMENT OF VERTEBRAL CARIES.

If a practical surgeon were asked, What is the proper treatment of early spinal disease ? he would unhesitatingly say *rest*. Yes, absolute and uninterrupted rest. But there is only one way of insuring such rest for a child, and that is by making him lie flat in bed. As I shall set forth directly, he is not to be kept actually in bed all the time ; but in every case the treatment is at any rate to be commenced by imprisoning him in a pillowless bed—not, let him clearly understand, if need be, as a punishment. This, I feel sure, is the only way of successfully inaugurating the treatment of *rest*. But it is of little use if, when in bed, the patient is allowed to roll about, sit up for his meals, or to hang over the side of the bed in order to pick up a dropped toy. The details of the treatment must be so seriously considered, and the medical man must make it his business to see that they are loyally and thoroughly carried out. He must not content himself merely with giving his instructions ; the parents will very likely want careful looking after as well as the boy, or else as soon as the doctor has left the house, or at any rate after a short period of rest, the boy will probably be allowed to do pretty well what he likes, and so the case will quietly drift. What the circumstances demand is the presence of a sort of clinical policeman in the house in the shape of a hospital-nurse.

I know that there are all sorts of schemes, corsets, apparatus and braces (as my American friends call them) for treating spinal caries without keeping the child flat. But they are all wrong—wrong in theory and wrong in practice ; and if they could be cast into the bottomless pit, and every case of spinal disease could from the beginning be treated by continuous rest in the horizontal position, there should be no more of those unsightly humps to invite speculative interference. Of course, I do not include in my anathema Phelps's box splint, the double Thomas's splint with head piece, or any form of cuirass which takes the child in bodily and keeps him flat. Indeed, the design of each one of them is well-nigh perfect ; but what I want utterly and severely to condemn is the modern ambulatory treatment of spinal caries. Indeed, I think it probable that after all the stir about the new treatment of humpbacks by forcible straightening has subsided, a most important beneficial clinical outcome will be that every surgeon will feel himself compelled to be far more careful in the adoption of