

**FITS: DIAGNOSIS AND
IMMEDIATE TREATMENT OF
CASES OF INSENSIBILITY
AND CONVULSIONS**

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Fits: Diagnosis and Immediate Treatment of Cases of Insensibility and Convulsions by John H. Waters

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F I T S

DIAGNOSIS AND IMMEDIATE TREATMENT

OF CASES OF

INSENSIBILITY AND CONVULSIONS

BY

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PREFACE

I HAVE been led to write the following pages, not with the idea of giving anything new to the profession, but to compile for my brother practitioners' and my own benefit the principal symptoms of most of those affections coming under the notice of police surgeons, in which insensibility or convulsions occur, and to assist us in forming an opinion of and treating these most difficult cases.

Ammonia is not brought forward as a novelty, but I simply remind medical men we have this means, by which most cases of insensibility can at once be treated without the risks that would follow the administration of other powerful drugs.

The remarks I have made respecting the

responsibility of drunkards are no doubt beyond my province, but I feel with every thinking man the incongruity of the present laws dealing with them and the crimes they perpetrate, and would gladly see a readjustment of their legal relations.

These are my reasons and excuses for sending forth this little volume, which I feel is very incomplete, but which I hope may be found useful.

101, JERMYN STREET,
S.W.

F I T S

THE importance of the subjects considered under this title is only equalled by the difficulties of their discussion, differentiation, and treatment; but as, unfortunately, so many cases are brought to our police stations, where these difficulties must be met, and where treatment is imperatively called for, I have ventured once more to bring them forward and, if possible, to gain some ray of additional light in the semi-darkness that surrounds them: from the policeman who finds them to the surgeon himself, there are none connected with these cases but dreads them. Take a common example; a man is brought into the station by the police, who have found him insensible. On the surgeon's arrival he sees the patient is comatose, and only learns he was lying on the pavement and supposed to be drunk, or that he has had a fit. The question arises, is it epilepsy? that is, does the attack depend on some brain or

systemic affection from which the patient will recover and again at some future time be attacked? or is the fit due to some organic disease by which life is threatened, as tumour, abscess, or aneurism of the brain, chronic meningitis, congestion of the brain, cerebral hæmorrhage, embolism of the middle cerebral artery, softening of the brain, concussion or contusion of the brain? is it due to injury, to poisoning either by alcohol, or any other poison? to Bright's disease, hysteria, insolation (sun-stroke), heart disease, &c., &c.? Having eliminated all these, we are accurate in thinking the fit is epileptiform, and that he will recover; but when we consider the difficulties that surround and almost prevent the possibility of diagnosis, we shall, I think, be justified in using any means that assist us, and in accepting all hints that shall simplify this Herculean task. The diagnosis would be sufficiently difficult were these straightforward, uncomplicated cases; but, unfortunately, with few exceptions, they have a halo of alcohol that surrounds them, masking or intensifying the symptoms upon which we rely to form our opinion; this, bad as it is, is not the greatest danger a patient runs. If we who have studied these cases fail to arrive at a just conclusion about them, still less is it

to be expected of a policeman; he, or indeed any ordinary individual, will believe the person to be drunk, and, unless the inspector on duty at the police station has some doubt about the case, the poor man will be put into a cell unseen by the surgeon. The wonder is, not that some die there, but that a great many more escape without harm; and it speaks very highly for the intelligent care these cases receive when in the cells. The public make a great outcry, and justly so, if some poor person dies there, but could they see how even the most disgusting cases are treated they would be surprised, as I have been, at the care shown for them; the tight dress is unfastened, the head raised on pillows kept on purpose, the boots taken off, even the hair of the women loosened, &c., &c., and all this done, not under the direction of the surgeon, but long before he can get there, by the ignorant (?) policeman.
