

Medical Matters.

CEMETERY INFECTION.



IT is a good many years, now, since an Act was passed in this country, forbidding further interments within graveyards situated in densely populated districts, and providing for the establishment of cemeteries in selected sites on the outskirts of great towns. There can be no doubt that this legislation had a considerable and very beneficial effect upon the Public Health, and that the great reduction in mortality which has occurred during the last two decades, may fairly be, in some degree, ascribed to this precautionary measure. Events which have recently occurred in Austria have led to a very complete investigation of this subject, and a valuable paper, which has recently been officially published, contains a number of facts of the greatest interest. It is shown that no less than 78 distinct epidemics of typhoid fever which occurred in Copenhagen and other large towns of Denmark, have been traceable to infection conveyed from neighbouring graveyards. The annual mortality around the three cemeteries of St. Petersburg, is said to have been no less than from 75 to 85 per 1,000 persons, while the mortality in other and poorer parts of the city was only 25 per 1,000. In Japan, during the cholera epidemic of 1877, a detachment of troops was sent to quell a disturbance in a remote district, and suffered very heavily from the disease. For nearly two years after that, cholera was hardly seen in the whole of Japan; then the authorities determined on removing the bodies of the soldiers who had died of the disease to a public cemetery. While the labourers were engaged in this work in two separate localities, cholera suddenly broke out amongst them in each place, and from these workmen a great epidemic originated. Sir Joseph Lister has quoted the case of a hospital, many of the patients in which were attacked by gangrene; and nothing appeared to check this predisposition until the bodies in a churchyard which was closely adjacent to the hospital had been exhumed and burned; then gangrene disappeared from the wards. Mr. Wheelhouse has told of a Yorkshire village where a virulent epidemic of scarlet fever reappeared after being absent for thirty years, and evidently in consequence of the fact that the remains

of the victims of the epidemic in the previous generation were, at that time, being exhumed for the purpose of adding part of the closed churchyard to the parsonage garden. All these facts—and there are many others of a similar nature—go to prove the close connection between the recurrence of epidemics and the disturbance of the soil in which persons dead from similar diseases have been buried. And the lessons for the public are obvious. Firstly, it becomes by no means certain that the earth-to-earth-burial, which is so widely advocated at the present time, is entirely safe from a sanitary point of view. The second lesson seems still more obvious and equally important—that the bodies of those dying from infectious diseases should be cremated; because by this means alone, and by this means most certainly, the germs of the disease and the possibilities of infecting future generations, are absolutely destroyed and prevented.

MERCURY IN CONSUMPTION.

AN Italian physician has recently published some valuable observations upon the use of Mercury in the treatment of patients suffering from Tubercular diseases. He chiefly used the drug in the form of hypodermic injections of corrosive sublimate, and carried out the treatment for many months with regularity. The results which he describes are very remarkable, because they consisted, for example, of the gradual drying up and disappearance of tubercular glands, and of chronic diseases of the nose and eyes; and in at least one instance, in which a patient with a tubercular family history was evidently suffering from incipient consumption, this method of treatment was followed by speedy improvement, and finally by apparent cure. The treatment will doubtless receive a very careful and extensive trial in this country, although it is at first sight difficult to understand or explain its *rationale*. Mercury is known to be a solvent of certain forms of new growth, notably those due to a specific cause; but it is, at the same time, so depressing when given in largish or long-continued doses, that it has probably never before been widely employed in the treatment of tubercular diseases. It is a curious illustration of the influence of fashion in therapeutics that, after being terribly abused, and partly falling into discredit for half a century, Mercury is now being largely used again, and with the greatest benefit, in many widely different diseases.

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