

Medical Matters.

SO-CALLED HYSTERIA.



IN a recent trial, a medical witness who was asked whether his patient was "hysterical," replied that the term had no meaning to him as he regarded it as a covering word for ignorance. How true his conclusion was, is evidenced by a remarkable article which has recently appeared in a French contemporary, and the avowed purpose of which was to show that attacks of hysteria may have a fatal termination; or, in other words, that the general impression that hysteria is a complaint of no vital importance is totally erroneous. As medical knowledge increases, one symptom after another which was formerly put down to that convenient asylum of ignorance—Hysteria—is discovered to be, like other symptoms, the mere outward and visible sign of an actual inward malady. The authors of the article in question, for example, are avowedly discussing cases of Hysteria; but as one of them showed, in an attack so characterised, spasm of the glottis occurred of so severe a type that tracheotomy was required to save the patient's life. Now if the laryngeal spasm had occurred in another individual it would have been traced, probably, to a definite nerve disturbance; and to term it "hysterical" in this case, merely because it occurred in a woman, is evidently not only unscientific but also foolish. The instance recorded of a child, aged six, who appeared to be dying from asphyxia, but who was rapidly cured by an application from an electric battery, is equally instructive. It is beyond dispute that many cases would be, and have been, saved from impending death by such an application, relieving the reflex nerve disturbance which caused the attack of suffocation. Indeed, in this particular article, a case is recorded of a girl, aged 20, whose life was evidently preserved by the battery being used when she was apparently choking. And how much reality there was in this particular instance, and how little "hysteria" had to do with the condition, is proved by the fact that she subsequently died from a similar attack. The form of angina pectoris which is usually described as hysterical, the authors

show cannot be regarded as free from danger! For they quote a case in which death occurred, although on *post-mortem* examination no evident disease of the heart was discovered; so that it is fair to argue that the actual cause of death escaped their observation. They refer to that form of absolute want of appetite which is usually described as "hysterical;" although great authorities upon the subject of gastric disease have shown that the worst forms of anorexia are those which are due to nerve disease of a definite type; and this is proved not only by the fact that such cases often die, but also by the equally significant point that, even if such patients are fed by artificial means, they appear to have no power of digesting or absorbing the nourishment. Finally, the authors comment upon the fact that sudden death may, and does, occur after an attack of vomiting which was supposed to be hysterical; but which more probably represented a failing heart's action. This latter point is one which is frequently overlooked, but which is of the gravest importance; because it is beyond all doubt that many patients have attacks of vomiting or retching because the failure of their heart's contractile power permits extreme congestion of the stomach to occur.

BLOOD-LETTING.

AT last, there appears to be a movement beginning in Germany in favour of the more frequent employment of blood-letting in cases of disease. And this is an important fact, because previous experience would lead one to infer that, now German scientists are discussing the matter, the remedy may become fashionable, and may therefore be once more adopted, in this subservient country. For many years past, some of the leading thinkers and writers in the medical profession in Great Britain, have been pointing out the mistake which is made at the present day, in neglecting the use of venesection in suitable cases. This is, of course, largely owing to the remedy having been extremely abused in former days; and to a most unjust prejudice having, therefore, been aroused against its employment. In reality, when the heart is overloaded and over-strained, the abstraction of even a small quantity of blood from the circulation is not only common-sensible but undoubtedly affords the most remarkable relief to the patient.

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