

Medical Matters.

TONICS.



A NORWEGIAN reader has asked us for information concerning tonics. The term is employed to denote medicines which restore "tone" to the system when, in consequence of injury or illness, it has become weakened, or, as it is popularly termed, relaxed. The word was originally used

in consequence of the discovery that certain medicines restore the vigour of the muscles when they have been weakened by disease. By improving their tonicity, the patient is able to move about better, while the circulation of the blood is also assisted by the same fact. The term, therefore, is applied to a large number of drugs which possess the property of thus improving the bodily health. It is a popular idea that only certain stimulants can be used as tonics. As a matter of fact, in acute diseases, alcohol is often of immense service, by assisting the action of the heart until the crisis of the disease is passed; and during convalescence, some form of alcohol is often invaluable by improving the digestion and increasing the appetite. But, with these exceptions, it may be said that stimulants are not tonics in the ordinary sense of the term; and with regard to alcohol it must also be remembered that every patient has some peculiarity. Some can take sherry, with whom neither claret nor port will agree, and a few can take no other stimulant than old port wine. Whisky often suits patients who cannot take any other form of alcohol. The great rule to be remembered is, that the spirit or the wine employed must be perfectly pure. The stimulants which disagree with people when in health usually have a most injurious effect upon them when sick; and it is therefore better by far to give no stimulant at all rather than one concerning whose quality or suitability there is any reasonable doubt. In the next place, there are many people who are unable to take tonics for any length of time; the drugs in question appearing to rapidly lose their effect, and requiring to be altered or discontinued. Finally, it should always be remembered that drugs can never take the place of ordinary nourishment, but that the object of the former is to increase the demand

for the latter; that is to say, to stimulate the appetite or improve the digestion. So the habit, which some persons exhibit, of constantly taking drugs is not only unwise but may even be most disadvantageous by substituting these for ordinary food.

CHILDREN'S MEDICINES.

ALL nurses are aware of the difficulties of the administration of medicines to children, and considerable attention has been given to this matter, especially in France. As a general rule, the smaller the quantity, and the more free from all smell, the medicine is, the more readily will children take a mixture either in the dry or liquid form. In administering them, it is well to remember that many children will take bitter medicines if they are given in a little water sweetened with sugar, or in a little coffee and milk. Powders are perhaps best taken when administered in a tablespoonful of soup, beef tea, or milk, and there are now special forms of chocolate creams made which completely disguise the taste of the nauseous powders which can be introduced into their composition. In France, the administration of drugs to children either in the form of inhalations, or by rubbing them into the skin, is largely employed; and especially in the former method are found to be very valuable in the treatment of throat and chest complaints.

THE MIRACLE DRUG.

THIS is the name applied in China to the Ginseng plant, the root of which is considered to possess miraculous healing properties. In appearance it resembles sarsaparilla, and in taste is mucilaginous and sweetish bitter. It is regarded as Imperial property and is sold, according to report, at its weight in gold. It is administered in the form of a decoction made from the root, in a kettle, like tea; and English observers who have reported upon its qualities appear to believe that it is about as useful as quinine—but not more so. It is probable, therefore, that the marvellous results which are reported to result from its use in China have been chiefly due to an implicit faith in its efficacy to cure disease. It has been patiently tried at any rate by scientific unbelievers in many different complaints, and they have not been satisfied as to its universal and powerful results.

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