

Medical Matters.

PALPITATION.



ONE of the commonest symptoms connected with the heart is that of the irregular and unusually rapid contractions to which the popular name of palpitation is given, and it is a symptom which is much misunderstood by unprofessional people. Many who suffer from it are convinced that they have some very serious heart affection, and that this possibly denotes their liability to sudden death. As a matter of fact, the irregular action in question may be caused, and very often is caused, by disturbances of the stomach and intestines, and without any disease of the heart at all. Patients, for example, who suffer from distention of the colon or flatulent dyspepsia suffer extremely from this symptom in consequence of the upward pressure of the abdominal contents upon the heart. In these cases, a well-known and distressing symptom is often added—an indescribable sensation of impending death, or, in slighter cases, the conviction that some serious calamity is about to occur. It was formerly considered that such prognostications of evil were due to some special foresight to which the Scotch gave the term of "second sight"; and undoubtedly the romance of such an explanation is destroyed when science proves that the sensation is only due to indigestion; just as it is well known now that the portentous dreams which cause some people such horrible nights, and such terrible forebodings, are only due to the inability of the stomach to complete the digestion of a heavy supper. The form of palpitation which is due to excessive tea-drinking is probably caused more by the consequent disturbance of the nervous system than by the intractable dyspepsia which the habit induces. It is a strange fact that the patients who suffer from heart disease are very frequently unaware of its presence, whereas many who consult medical men firmly convinced that their hearts are seriously affected, are found to be merely suffering from some functional disorder,

INSECTS IN SURGERY.

It is reported, on excellent authority, that some Greek surgeons still employ an original, and at the same time very antiquated, method of closing wounds. A large species of ant is held with a pair of forceps close to an incised wound, the edges of which are drawn closely together. The insect opens its mandibles and seizes the edges, keeping them tightly together and its head is then severed from its body, the mandibles remaining in position. It is reported that, in the case of long wounds, six or seven ants' heads have been seen in such a position. It is a curious fact that some years ago, the same proceeding was reported as being a common practice in Brazil, where it has also existed apparently from time immemorial. The British medical men and nurses who are now at work in the medical hospitals of Greece will undoubtedly employ methods of animal suture of wounds in the shape of catgut, or silkworm gut, which are more modern, and at the same time more artistic, than the custom referred to.

HYPNOTISM.

THIS subject has received very careful consideration during the last few months in scientific circles in various countries, especially in the United States. Briefly it may be said that there are two schools of thought concerning this condition; one holding that it is merely an hysterical manifestation, and the other that it is a distinct condition of the brain and nervous system which may be induced under certain definite conditions in any man, woman or child entirely free from any hysterical tendency. All observers, however, are agreed that the more easily a person can concentrate his attention, the more easily can he be hypnotised; and furthermore, that hypnotic sleep is undoubtedly a perverted unconsciousness, the brain centres being in an excited condition and unable to act in a healthy manner. The value of hypnotism in medical treatment has been widely discussed, and there is still the greatest diversity of opinion concerning this; but inasmuch as it is certain that the condition is one which is not entirely free from danger to the mental state of the subject, it is generally held that as an ordinary element of treatment hypnotism is rarely, if ever, justifiable, though it is beyond dispute that, in certain cases, for example, of alcoholism and the morphia or chloral habit, cures have been effected by hypnotism

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