

**Medical Matters.****BISMUTH.**

A READER has asked us for information concerning the use of Bismuth in cases of dyspepsia, and as to the method of its action. The drug is perhaps most useful when employed in cases of ulceration of the stomach, and its operation is generally thus explained: The powder is assumed, in consequence of experiments which have been made on the subject, to be deposited upon the surface of the ulcer, and to act, therefore, exactly as an ordinary antiseptic powder does, when applied, for example, to an ulcer on the surface of the skin. The first necessity in the latter case is to cleanse the surface and render it antiseptic and quiescent, so that the process of disintegration shall be stopped, and a healthy healing process commenced; and that the latter, then, shall be permitted to continue without being interrupted by renewed irritation of the surface. In fact, Cleanliness and Rest, the two great needs for the healing process, are thus obtained. In the case of ulceration of the stomach, the dense powder of Bismuth being deposited on the ulcer, and being both antiseptic and astringent, exercises both qualities upon the open surface, cleansing it and causing its contraction. The acid secretions of the stomach, and the more or less irritating particles of food are thus kept off the ulcerated surface, the secretion from which is dried up, and prevented from decomposition, by the powdered coating over it. The surface of the ulcer, therefore, contracts, and so gradually closes; fresh deposits of Bismuth being made from successive doses of the drug as the diseased surface becomes denuded. The treatment is based upon physiological principles; and, whether this explanation be exactly correct or not, the use of Bismuth, in large doses, is undoubtedly of the greatest benefit in these particular cases. The value of the drug is equally well-known, and it is still more largely employed, in cases of diarrhoea from catarrhal ulceration of the intestines—in the latter cases acting probably in the same manner as in those of ulceration of the stomach. Even in the more common cases, in which there is no actual ulceration, the drug is found to be most useful, because of its astringent effects upon the irritated and inflamed mucous membrane.

**CATARRH.**

THERE are few words in medicine which are so popular with the public, and yet so little understood, as catarrh. It may mean very little, and it often means very much. It is noticeable, however, that the most experienced medical practitioners are those who are least inclined to make light of the complaint, and who take the most active measures for the prompt extinction of a "cold." A "cold in the head" of the ordinary type is typical of catarrh in every other part of the body. Some chilling of the surface causes the vessels of the mucous membrane to become overloaded with blood—or, in other words, congestion occurs. In consequence of this, the mucous membrane swells up, and becomes hot and dry. After a short time, which may be hastened by the effect of medicines, or retarded by neglect, the blood vessels exude serum and contract, the mucous membrane becomes softened and moistened by the excretion of mucus from its surface, and thus the congestion is relieved. Then after more or less flow of mucus from the membrane, the condition disappears, and the parts are restored to their natural state. In chronic catarrh, which is generally due to neglect, the mucous membrane remains more or less inflamed, and its excretion usually becomes more or less purulent, instead of merely mucous, a condition which may pass on to ulceration of the membrane. In the lungs, for example, the condition is especially unfavourable, inasmuch as by the coughing which it excites, the tissue of the lung itself is more or less injured, and so from an apparently simple catarrh, chronic bronchitis is developed, and then emphysema; and this result illustrates the importance of treating the most trivial cold with care, especially if the subject be old, be enfeebled by some other illness, or be constitutionally prone to Consumption. Just as a spark may light up a conflagration which devastates a whole city, so a neglected attack of catarrh is often the starting point of progressive and irreparable disease—or, in popular language, asthma. Or, again, from the distended condition of the air cells, and the difficulty in the passage of blood through the lung, more or less disturbance in the heart's action, and then, perhaps the occurrence of actual heart disease, may follow. Thus, catarrh often becomes the starting point of serious organic disease.

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