

Medical Matters.**HINTS TO POISONERS.**

CONSIDERABLE astonishment has been expressed, publicly by a well-known coroner, and privately by many medical men, concerning some recent utterances of Sir James Crichton-Browne. Speaking at a meeting of the Pharmaceutical Society, at which he was aware that reporters were present, that gentleman deemed the occasion appropriate to give hints to poisoners, as to the best method of committing murder without being discovered. He may perhaps say that this was not his intention, and we would accept it; but in simple English that is the effect of his statements; because he expressed surprise that poisoners still kept to the old-fashioned methods and used materials which chemical analysis could easily distinguish, whilst he carefully pointed out that modern science was aware of many agents which were extremely destructive to human life, but which could not be discovered by the microscope or by chemical means. It is obvious that such information was unnecessary to the learned Society which the speaker was addressing; and his remarks were therefore irrelevant, as well as mischievous. They merely disseminated a knowledge concerning the art of successful murder which is not at present possessed by the criminal classes, and which it is such a public danger that they should possess, that no man of ordinary intelligence and circumspection would consider it either wise or justifiable to impart it to them. The remarkable and irresponsible fluency of speech, which is distinctive of inmates of lunatic asylums, may possibly be contagious; and if this be so, it would furnish a charitable explanation for what otherwise appears to be most frivolous loquacity. Even then, it must be universally regretted that knowledge so liable to be abused, and in that case so highly detrimental to the public, should be conveyed broadcast with such foolish recklessness. If Sir James Crichton Browne intends to instruct criminal lunatics outside asylums, as well as to observe their conduct and behaviour inside those retreats, we can only hope that the press will carefully abstain from reporting his remarks in future. For the moment, we sympathise with the medical profession in their indignation con-

cerning his most foolish and mischievous statements, and earnestly trust that those who desire to poison will not be able to obtain the means to which he has directed their attention.

BURIED ALIVE.

MANY persons have the utmost horror of being buried alive, and apparently imagine that this is a result which not infrequently occurs. Of course there are well authenticated instances in which this terrible mistake has been made; but in this country, at any rate, with our habit of delayed sepulture, it must be extremely rare. In tropical climates, where burial usually takes place on the day of death, it is conceivable that the accident may occur more frequently. The following statement, recently published, by Dr. Chew, of Calcutta, is a case in point:—

"I died," says Dr. Roger G. S. Chew, "as it was supposed, on January 18th, 1874, and was laid out for burial, as the most careful examination failed to show the slightest traces of life. I had been in this state for twenty hours, and in another three hours would have been closed up for ever, when my eldest sister, who was leaning over the head of my coffin crying over me, declared she saw my lips move. The friends who had come to take their last look at me tried to persuade her it was only fancy, but, as she persisted, Dr. Donaldson was sent for to convince her that I was really dead. For some unexplained reason he had me taken out of my coffin and examined very carefully from head to foot. Noticing a peculiar, soft fluctuating swelling at the base of my neck, just where the clavicles meet the sternum, he went to his brougham, came back with his case of instruments, and, before any one could stop him or ask what he was going to do, laid open the tumour and plunged in a tracheotomy tube, when a quantity of pus escaped, and, releasing the pressure on the carotids and thyroid, was followed by a rush of blood and some movement on my part that startled the doctor. Restoratives were used, and I was slowly nursed back to life, but the tracheotomy tube (I still carry the scar) was not finally removed till September, 1875."

The public have the remedy for any such accident in their own hands, for they can insist upon Parliament making it illegal for any body to be buried until it has been examined by a medical expert.

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