

**Medical Matters.****ACUTE DEMENTIA.**

A reader asks for information as to the causes and progress of this disease, and, as usual, we have much pleasure in complying with such a request. It is a well-marked brain disorder, which has been very variously described. One French writer classed it with idiocy, and another considered it to be a form of melancholia. It has always been a moot question, whether the term "acute" should be employed to describe a condition which is, after all, of a very passive nature, but it is a useful definition, and has, therefore, been retained in contradistinction to the "chronic" form of the disease. The patients are almost invariably young, and this distinguishes it from melancholia which is more common in older people. The history is usually something of this kind; a young man or woman after some severe shock or extreme fright which, to use the popular expression, "frightens them out of their senses," remains horror-struck, and apparently suffering from mental paralysis. They are not deranged, in the ordinary sense of the term; that is to say, they are not deprived either of feeling or of intellect; but their movements are, so to speak, automatic and mechanical, and, generally, they either stand or sit motionless, and staring at vacancy, for hours or days. Or, on the other hand, they are in incessant motion, and, for example, will snap the jaws together, or wag the head from side to side, for hours, and even days, at a time. The heart-power slowly fails, the hands and feet become icy cold; they do not eat, and can only be fed with the greatest difficulty. All the functions of the body are affected; sleep is often absent; and the patient either dies of exhaustion or, under proper treatment, slowly recovers. The difference between Acute Dementia and what French writers term Melancholy with Stupor, is that the latter patients are generally older, the trouble generally begins in consequence of long-standing mental worries and anxiety, and it differs from acute dementia, in being less curable, and much more rapid in its course. The patients are often suicidal, they refuse food, rapidly emaciate, hardly ever sleep, and, as a rule, the bodily powers fail

as rapidly as the mental. A curious practical fact in both classes of patients, is the marked weakness of the heart from which they suffer, and in both, the most successful results are obtained by surrounding the patient with great warmth—extra clothes, large fires, and a temperature of the room which, to ordinary people would be insupportable, do more for the improvement of these patients than any amount of medicines.

**WOOD PAVEMENTS.**

THE results to the public health of the different kinds of pavement used in the streets have been widely discussed in various countries, and a Polish sanitarian has recently made considerable researches into the subject, upon the pavements used in Warsaw. The wooden pavements in this town are blocks of pine, impregnated with sulphate of copper, and it was found, as might have been expected, that the blocks at the sides of the street were considerably more defiled than those in the middle of the road. The wood, however, was generally impregnated with numberless millions of virulent bacteria, which must have contaminated the atmosphere of the town generally. This fact has often been asserted on theoretical grounds, and the danger is now proved to actually exist in practice. The conclusion, which is arrived at, is that asphalt, inasmuch as it is quite unabsorbent, and can, therefore, be freely cleaned by a stream of water, must be more healthy than pavements made of an absorbent material like wood.

**CANCER HOUSES.**

DURING the past year or two, we have, on several occasions, referred in this column to the increasing evidence in favour of cancer being connected, in some manner, with certain houses. Although it is difficult, at present, to understand whether this connection is to be found in the walls or floorings of a house, or in the soil upon which it is built, a remarkable fact which is worth noting and which seems strongly to support the theory in question, has recently been published. In a certain street in Bath 13 deaths have occurred from cancer in ten years, on one side of the street, and only one death from the disease upon the other side. It is well known moreover, that Bath has a very high death-rate from this disease, although this may of course be due to the fact that so many invalids are sent to the town in the hope that its climate may benefit their general health.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)