

The Poor Law Infirmary Matrons' Association.

A meeting of the above Association was, by the courtesy of Miss Dodds, held on January 25th, at the Matron's House, Bethnal Green Infirmary. There was a very large attendance of the members of the Association, the various items on the agenda giving rise to very animated and useful discussions.

The first subject before the meeting was—"Does cleanliness receive too much attention in Poor Law Infirmarys at the expense of the Nursing?"

In the debate which ensued the members, whilst being very generally in favour of the substitution of wardmaids for scrubbers, were unanimously of opinion that the question should be answered by a decided negative, and the very high quality of the nursing in a modern poor law infirmary emphasised.

The second item, "The Management of Infirmary Laundries," roused a most interesting discussion, various systems in vogue in different institutions being explained and their advantages pointed out.

Practical Points.

The Preparation of Catgut for Surgical Purposes.

A Note on the "Preparation of Catgut for Surgical Purposes" contributed to the medical papers by Lord Lister is of great interest to nurses, to whom the care of ligatures is frequently entrusted. At one time the use of catgut for ligatures and sutures fell into disrepute owing to the difficulty of rendering it aseptic, and a formula for its preparation coming from the pen of the founder of antiseptic surgery must be received with the deepest respect, and is of the utmost value.

Lord Lister writes:—"Catgut used for ligatures or sutures in surgery should fulfil various conditions. It should, after soaking in water or blood serum, be strong enough to bear any strain to which it may be subjected, and should hold perfectly when tied in a reef-knot. It must not be so rigid as it lies among the tissues as to have any chance of working its way out by mechanical irritation. Nor should it be too quickly absorbed, but should be consumed so slowly by the cells of the new tissue that grows at its expense, that in case of the ligature of an arterial trunk in its continuity, it may serve sufficiently long as a support for the substitute living thread in its embryonic condition. At the same time, it is essential that the catgut should be securely aseptic when applied.

"Of the various substances which I have tried for the preparation of catgut, that which has,

with one exception, most nearly approached the ideal is sulphate of chromium. The one exception is secure asepsis of the gut substance, this salt being utterly untrustworthy as a germicide; this defect is easily remedied by the addition of a little corrosive sublimate, the powerful germicidal action of which is not prevented by the chromium sulphate.

"I was at one time discouraged from using chromium sulphate by finding that it varied extremely in quality according to the manufacturer who supplied it. Thus one sample got from a well-known firm proved quite insoluble in water.* But a perfectly satisfactory result was obtained by adding solution of sulphurous acid (P.B.) to solution of chromic acid until the rich orange-brown of the latter has passed through grass-green to the pure blue of chromium sulphate. When this has occurred no more should be added, since free sulphurous acid produces a precipitate with bichloride of mercury, and would thus, in proportion to its amount, withdraw the germicide from solution when the two liquids are mixed. In order to make quite sure that no free sulphurous acid is present, it is well to keep a few drops of the chromic acid liquid in reserve, and add them when the blue colour has appeared, so as to restore the green tint.

"Another point that requires attention arises from the fact that the P.B. solution of sulphurous acid, as obtained from the chemist, is generally somewhat deficient in the amount of SO_2 , in consequence of loss by volatilisation. Hence it is necessary to use a smaller quantity of water for dissolving the chromic acid than would otherwise be used; and when the proper tint has been got, add enough distilled water to bring the liquid to the requisite measure.

"The following directions for preparing what is known as chromic (or sometimes sulpho-chromic) catgut in accordance with the above conditions were given to manufacturing chemists in 1894, but have never yet been published:—

"The preparing liquid must be twenty times the weight of the catgut. So for 40 grains of catgut 800 grains of preparing liquid are required. It is made by mixing two liquids—namely, the chromium sulphate liquid and the sublimate liquid.

The sublimate liquid is:—

Corrosive sublimate	2 grains.
Distilled water	320 "

The sublimate may be dissolved by heat, but the solution must be used cold.

* I learn from Messrs. Morson (of Elm Street, Gray's Inn Road), who have devoted a great deal of attention to this salt, that its most suitable form requires very great care in its preparation in order to avoid variation in its composition, and also that it is extremely hygroscopic, so that, unless it is very carefully preserved, water in variable amount becomes associated with it, another cause of uncertainty in its composition.

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