

## Medical Matters.

### CONSTIPATION.

Dr. A. F. Hertz read a paper on Constipation at the meeting of the British Medical Association at Sheffield, giving a lantern demonstration of radiographs showing the passage of the bismuth meals through the different parts of the bowel. As reported in the *Lancet*, he said that three conditions were generally recognised as constipation: (1) insufficient frequency of defæcation; (2) insufficient fæces excreted compared with the amount of residue which the food should have; and (3) abnormally dry and hard fæces due to prolonged retention before excretion. In both (1) and (2) the bowels might be opened daily, and yet death had occurred in such cases from perforation of a stercoral ulcer. The three conditions could be united together by considering constipation as a condition in which none of the residue of a meal was excreted within 72 hours. It could be recognised in doubtful cases by giving charcoal with the food and watching for its appearance in the fæces. To avoid constipation two things were essential: (1) the passage from the stomach to the rectum should not be delayed beyond the normal period, which varied between 12 and 48 hours; and (2) the excretion of the fæces from the rectum should take place within 24 hours of their arrival. Passage through the intestine, shown by the X rays to be delayed, was almost confined to the part of the large intestine beyond the middle of the transverse colon.

Deficient motor activity was relieved by a suitable diet or an aperient. The various causes were:—1. Inefficient intestinal musculature: constitutional, senile, in anæmia and cachexia of tuberculosis or cancer, after acute fevers, and certain inflammatory diseases of the intestines. 2. Depression of the central and peripheral nervous system, resulting in diminution in response to stimuli which normally produced peristalsis: functional (neurasthenia, hypochondriasis, insanity) and organic (tabes, meningitis, cerebral tumour). 3. Insufficient stimulation of peristalsis was brought about by too little food or too little indigestible residue or chemical excitants in food. 4. Cases of stimulation of the sympathetic nerves inhibiting peristalsis were often relieved by sedatives: reflex from painful viscera (stomach, ovary, etc.); direct in lead poisoning (when without colic). 5. In obstruction aperients were of little use, as X rays showed that the passage up to the obstruction was often abnormally rapid.

## Disorders Incident to Birth.

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### A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE INFANTS HOSPITAL, WESTMINSTER, S.W.

Birth is only an incident in the life of a human organism: a most important and interesting incident, for mother, infant, and friends, but still an incident. And it is to the disorders incident to this incident that I desire to direct your attention to-day. This incident only occurs once in the life of the individual, but its influence may mar the most perfect and handicap the most useful and valuable of lives. Our subject is therefore one of far reaching importance.

It is strange, considering the numerous books that have been written relative to children's ailments, how very few deal with disorders and derangements occurring at and dependent on birth.

Let me for a moment remind you of the stages in the development of the infant prior to birth, for this will enable us to understand better some of the disorders to which I shall have to refer.

[The chief stages in development were then indicated on the slate by means of a diagram.]

The act of birth, although a natural condition, a physiological process, under modern conditions of life, is often attended by much danger to the mother and in many cases total disaster to the offspring.

As you well know, the mortality of infants during the first few days of life is greater than at any later period.

We have heard much of recent years concerning "meddlesome midwifery," and there is no doubt but that ignorance, apathy, neglect, and wilful prejudice are to be held responsible for many of the tragedies which result from labour.

I have used the term "disorder" advisedly, and of set purpose. It is a designation wider than disease, more comprehensive even than derangement, for under it we can group not only the definite bodily maladies dependent on diseased conditions, but also injuries, and the more or less temporary irregularities of function, which often accompany and result from the transition from intra-uterine life to an independent existence, at least as regards im-

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