

Medical Matters.



HÆMOPTYSIS.

IN future, it is proposed to answer, in this column, some of the questions relating to medical matters upon which readers of this journal seek for enlightenment; and such questions, therefore, may be sent to the Editor; and will be answered as speedily as possible. It is possible, however, that the number of other questions or more important subjects may delay the answer for two or three weeks. A pertinent and important question is sent in the following form: "In pneumonia, when the sputum becomes bright red instead of rusty, is this hæmoptysis, or merely more acute inflammation? In a case of habitual but slight cough, the pus-like sputum at times becomes pink. Is the tinge of colour a sign of threatened hæmoptysis or incipient phthisis, or merely some irritation set up by cold?" Hæmoptysis is the coughing up of large quantities of blood from the lungs. Any less quantity, therefore, than a wineglassful can hardly be described by that term. It is distinguished from Hæmatemesis by its colour being bright red with a mixture of froth and phlegm, whereas in the latter condition—signifying the vomiting of blood—the material is usually dark, or often black, from partial digestion, and is usually mixed with fragments of food. In pneumonia, the substance of the affected part of the lung becomes engorged with blood and almost solid in parts. In consequence, the bloodvessels transude into the air passages more or less blood which, becoming mixed with the phlegm, gives to the latter the well-known "rusty" appearance. But sometimes a vessel will burst, and then the patient will expectorate several ounces of bright blood. This does not necessarily mean that the inflammation is more acute, but only that one particular vessel happens to be more brittle and easily ruptured than another. The circumstance therefore is by no means unusual in old people with hardened bloodvessels who are suffering from pneumonia, and in such persons, also, a mere violent fit of coughing will sometimes cause the same symptom. When hæmoptysis occurs repeatedly, in considerable quantities, and in persons who are apparently recovering from pneumonia, it usually signifies the break-

ing down of lung substance into cavities, and thus is an important and dangerous sign of incipient Consumption. But it should always be remembered that, in small quantities, the presence of blood may mean little or nothing. Streaks of blood in the sputum, or even a teaspoonful or two may come simply from a small ruptured vessel in the throat, in consequence of frequent violent coughing. Or again, in many instances of acute lung mischief, or of obstructive heart disease, a considerable quantity of blood may be coughed up to the immense relief of the patient. In such cases, indeed, the bleeding represents Nature's effort to cure the patient by relieving the overfull bloodvessels and congested tissues. In any case of bleeding from the chest, it is a golden rule for the Nurse to remember that the patients must not only be kept quiet but also cheerful. Their minds can be set at rest, at once, if the bleeding is only slight and occasional; but, if they are permitted to become excited and nervous concerning this symptom, the loss of blood will probably be much increased.

SUBLIMATE AS AN ANTISEPTIC.

A VERY important address, delivered last week before the British Gynæcological Society, dealt with the remarkable diminution in the mortality of patients in Lying-in Hospitals since the use of antiseptics was enforced in these Institutions. Remarkable figures were given showing that the City Road Hospital was formerly simply devastated by puerperal fever, 1 patient out of 19 dying in some years from this cause. Again and again the place was closed and cleansed most effectually, but after a short interval the death-rate again crept up. Finally, it was almost decided to pull the Hospital down and rebuild it altogether. At that moment antiseptics began to be employed as a routine treatment. In every case injections of corrosive sublimate of the strength of 1 in 2,000 were given, and lotions of 1 in 1,000 were used for disinfecting purposes. From that moment the mortality fell, and during the past five years only 5 patients have died out of 10,000, and during 1896 not one single death occurred in the Hospital. Such results, in the face of the previous facts, are quite unanswerable, and a more wonderful tribute to the value of the antiseptic system could hardly be given than such a proof that by its introduction puerperal fever has been made a preventable disease.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)