

Medical Matters.

THE USES OF CHARCOAL.



ATTENTION has recently been drawn to the many valuable properties of charcoal in the treatment of both medical and surgical cases. The finely powdered material possesses an extreme power of absorption, especially of gases, and a power of conveying oxygen in its minute interstices. It is, therefore, very useful in the treatment of cases of dyspepsia; especially in those where irritability, or even slight ulceration, of the stomach or bowels is present. Where the condition known as "fermentation" exists, the antiseptic qualities of the charcoal destroy the parasite which is the cause of this process. In surgery, however, the greatest advantages of charcoal are probably found. As a dressing of unhealthy or gangrenous sores or wounds, a charcoal poultice causes cleansing of the surface and removal of the diseased tissues, perhaps greater than that obtained by any other application or method of treatment. The remedy, however, is comparatively little used at the present day, perhaps because since the introduction of the antiseptic system, sloughing wounds are so much more rarely met with than was formerly the case. Still, especially in military surgery, the use of charcoal, which was once so general, might again be employed with great advantage.

INFANTILE DIARRHŒA.

A TREATMENT which has been recently employed for this dangerous and common condition is based upon both physiology and common sense, and has certainly been attended with much success. It consists, practically, in giving the child nothing but large quantities of water which has been carefully boiled, and so sterilized, and continuing this treatment for twenty-four or thirty-six hours. The theory is, that the great majority of cases being caused by irritating undigested food, the first essential must be to wash this out of the intestines, while at the same time large quantities of water must soothe, cleanse, and relieve the inflamed surfaces of the mucous membrane, and thus accomplish a double good. The same method has been largely

employed, especially in Germany and in the United States, in the treatment of typhoid fever; but in this case it has been customary to add to the water some powerful antiseptic, so as not only to cleanse but also to disinfect the ulcers around the ileo-cæcal valve. It is claimed by the advocates of the treatment that they thus obtain better results than by any other measures, that the temperature soon falls, and the diarrhœa ceases; and that the duration of the disease is markedly lessened. The one thing certain is, that both in typhoid fever and in infantile diarrhœa, even if it effects no good, the treatment could do no harm, and that it is distinctly in accord with the great principle of antiseptic cleansing of any diseased surface.

CATHETER FEVER.

ONE of our readers, who has heard this term used in connection with one of her patients, by the doctor, has asked us for information concerning its meaning. It is an expression of comparatively recent origin, and is used to denote the attack of feverishness which sometimes follows the use of the catheter, especially in highly nervous patients. An hour or so after the use of the instrument, the patient has a more or less severe shivering fit, or even a distinct rigor. The temperature rises quickly to perhaps 104° F., and remains more or less high for several days. There is sometimes a slight amount of delirium and almost invariably signs of nervous prostration, but rarely much pain. In some cases, the condition is undoubtedly due to an attack of cystitis, or inflammation of the bladder. At other times, there is marked inflammation of the prostate. Very rarely, there is nothing definite to account for the temperature, and in these latter cases, as a rule, the fever rapidly subsides and is probably largely due to nerve influence. It may be regarded as certain that many of the cases, therefore, are of a septic nature, and that the fever is caused by the introduction of some germ life through the medium of a dirty catheter. Certainly, these cases have been much less frequent since the introduction of the antiseptic system, and the scrupulous carefulness with which catheters, like all other surgical appliances, are now cleansed and sterilized before being employed.

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