

Medical Matters.

TYPHOID FEVER.



THE serious outbreak of typhoid fever which is devastating Maidstone, and is more than usually virulent in other towns, has drawn renewed attention to the fact that it is undoubtedly a preventable disease. Propagated by a specific germ, with well-ascertained methods of conveyance into the human body, chiefly by means of contaminated milk or water, it might have been thought that the improvements of sanitary science would have resulted in practically obliterating the disease. The ordinary type now met with is, of course, well known to be less common and less severe than that formerly seen. But, at the same time, it constantly re-appears in various districts, and, on each occasion, a more or less rapid dissemination takes place. In the case of Maidstone there is reason to hope that the source of the infection having been found and stopped, and proper disinfection having been adopted in the case of those who are now affected, the epidemic may speedily be stamped out. The advantages, at any rate, of the compulsory notification of the disease have been abundantly proved, because by this means the sanitary authorities have been able to immediately isolate and disinfect patients. With regard to medical treatment, the opinion is now general that the attempts which have been made to abort, or cut short, the disease have not been successful, and have been much over vaunted. The treatment is becoming simplified in the direction of securing more complete cleanliness of the ulcerated bowel. Large quantities of water, generally containing some antiseptic preparation, are usually prescribed at the present day, and guaiacol, given in small doses every two hours, is reported to have been very valuable for the same reason.

THE X RAYS IN MEDICINE.

HITHERTO, of course, the great advantages of the new photography have been exhibited in surgical cases—in the discovery of foreign bodies, injuries to the bones, and so forth. But the use of these rays in medical cases, has recently received considerable attention, and an interesting paper lately published in

Boston, describes the results obtained in 500 examinations of the chest. In brief, it is stated that when disease is present it is possible, with the fluorescent screen, for the doctor to see darker shadows where there are tubercular deposits, consolidation due to pneumonia, aneurisms, new growths or fluid either in the pericardium or in the pleura. It seems that the outlines of the heart can, by this method, after a little practice, be accurately determined, and thus the presence or absence of hypertrophy or dilatation can be observed. At any rate, the practical point is of great importance that, by the use of the screen, the presence of pneumonia, it is stated, can be recognized before the ordinary physical signs can be distinguished.

THE SUPPURATION OF STITCHES.

IN former times, surgeons were accustomed to regard union by the first intention, that is to say, immediate healing after an operation, as the highest result obtainable. But, in too many cases, wounds broke down and only healed slowly, continuing to discharge pus until they were nearly closed. The advent of the antiseptic system at once altered all this, because it was then understood that immediate healing meant the absence of bacteria, while suppuration implied that the surface of the wounds had not been absolutely aseptic. Since that great principle was discovered, and proper antiseptic precautions were taken, it is the rule rather than the exception for wounds to heal by the first intention. Of course, there are some patients with enfeebled or broken down constitutions, or who are suffering from some diseased condition, which prevent a healthy healing process; and in such cases no amount of external antisepticism can be effectual. But, putting aside these comparatively rare cases, immediate healing is nowadays expected after surgical operations. One of the precautions which is most necessary to secure that end is a careful preparation of the material used for ligatures and stitches. It is essential that both the needles and the silk or catgut employed should be specially cleaned and sterilized before being used. In many cases, where this precaution has not been taken, the track of each suture has suppurated and healed slowly, even although the wound itself has remained absolutely aseptic, and may have healed well.

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