

Medical Matters.

LUNATICS AT LARGE.



THE great increase which has been noted in the published number of persons of unsound mind has been partially, at least, explained on the assumption that, at the present day, lunatics are much more commonly treated in public and private asylums — and are, therefore, so to speak, known and registered — than was formerly the case, when large numbers were treated in unlicensed, and therefore, unknown, houses. But it is evident that, in some parts of the country, the arrangements for the care of lunatics are markedly deficient. At a recent inquest in Liverpool, the coroner stated that he had called attention to the large number of lunatics who were at large in the district, because there was no accommodation for them in the local asylums. The Board of Guardians were represented at this inquest by their solicitor, who placed the blame on the County Asylums' Board. Had that body been represented, it would probably have transferred the blame on to some other shoulders; but the inquest itself proved the public danger of such a system. It was held in consequence of a recognized lunatic having committed suicide, by throwing himself in front of a train; efforts to secure his admission into an infirmary having been made without avail. There is no obvious reason why the lunatic in question should not have killed one or more other people instead of killing himself; and it is needless to point out the serious disadvantages, not to say dangers, to the public, of madmen with homicidal tendencies being thus allowed to wander about at large. The blame for such a state of affairs must rest with someone, and, unfortunately, there is reason to believe that there are many other districts, besides Liverpool, in which proper accommodation is not provided for lunatics, and in which, therefore, they are left at large to the common danger.

DIASTOL.

THIS preparation of Extract of Malt is steadily growing in favour with the medical profession. The diastase which it contains is in a concentrated and powerful form, and

it acts, exceedingly well in cases in which the digestive and, therefore, nourishing qualities of the malt extracts are desired. It is prepared by the Standard Malt Extract Company, which, in itself, is a good guarantee of its purity, and deserves a trial by all medical men who desire to use such a preparation.

THE X RAYS AGAIN.

AN American paper has recently described some curious experiments made at the Harvard Medical School by two students. They employed the Rontgen ray to observe the process of swallowing and digesting. They mixed with various kinds of food some sub-nitrate of bismuth, which made the mass visible in its movements down the throat and in the stomach. It was found that the progress of the bolus of food could thus be traced in its slow and steady progress down the œsophagus into the stomach, and round the walls of that organ, returning to the cardiac end from the pylorus apparently through the central part of the stomach, while in the return to the cardiac end the food again revolved round the walls. As soon as the metallic substance was disengaged from the food, the progress of the latter became more and more imperceptible.

THE JUBILEE OF CHLOROFORM.

IT is just fifty years ago, since chloroform was employed as an anæsthetic, and amongst the many other celebrations which this year has seen, that which has recently been described as the Jubilee of Chloroform, deserves general attention. It is hardly realized now, what sufferings must have been experienced in former days before the blessings of anæsthesia were discovered; and the triumphs of surgical science in the last half century have undoubtedly to a large extent been rendered possible by the painlessness of their procedure. It is, for example, certain that many operations now performed on either the brain or the abdomen would have been impossible of fulfilment in former days. Just at present, an active discussion is proceeding in the medical world as to the best and safest method of administering the vapour. It is undeniable that the simple handkerchief, so commonly used in former days, was much less frequently attended by dangerous symptoms than the more or less complicated apparatus which is now employed.

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