

Medical Matters.

A NOVEL TREATMENT FOR HERNIA.



AN old-fashioned method of reducing a difficult hernia, is by the application of cold to the outer surface of the skin over it, by means of an ordinary ice-bag. But in many instances this method fails, perhaps because the cold is not sufficiently great. The object to be obtained of course, is the contraction of the blood-vessels of, and around, the extruded intestine, and therefore the lessening of the size of the protrusion, so that by gentle pressure, the bowel can be passed back into the abdominal cavity. An ingenious surgeon who was lately called to see a case of strangulated hernia found that the customary ice-bags had been resting on the rupture for some hours, but that the skin was barely chilled. He, therefore, considered that the degree of cold had not been sufficient to obtain the contraction desired, and, therefore, poured some ether, which he fortunately had with him, into the bottle of a lady's scent spray, and sprayed the fluid over the surface of the swelling. In three or four minutes, this had visibly lessened in size, the skin and subjacent parts being, of course, really frozen by the rapid evaporation of the ether vapour; and then very slight pressure with the hand was sufficient to bring about complete reduction of the hernia. The case is well worthy of being placed on record, and is an excellent example both of readiness of resource, and of the application of theoretical knowledge to practical treatment.

SILK OR CATGUT.

THE question of the best material for a surgical ligature is still unsettled. Every operator uses that which he believes yields him the best results in the healing of wounds, and many employ one material for one class of operations, and another kind for others. Still, in the great majority of cases, and by the great majority of operators, silk and prepared gut, either catgut or silkworm gut, are the materials chiefly employed. There are comparatively few cases in which silver, or other metal wire, is used, even for sutures. With regard to silk, there are many objections to

its employment, especially in deep tissues. In abdominal surgery, for example, trouble is often caused by the irritation set up by a long silk ligature, which may become infected, and then set up suppuration along its track. Silk, indeed, is so much more difficult to disinfect than catgut, that it is always a source of some uncertainty. French surgeons, in particular, have for this reason almost discarded silk in the performance of abdominal operations; but, with most scrupulous care in its preparation, it is still popular with many English surgeons, on account both of its strength and extreme pliability.

LEPROSY.

A VERY important conference of medical experts has recently been held in Berlin, to discuss the question of Leprosy. Considerable differences of opinion, of course, were shown upon many of the details connected with the disease; but there appears to have been a very marked unanimity upon the following points, and the importance of these could hardly be exaggerated:—First, that Leprosy is caused by the presence of a distinct bacillus in the human body, although the conditions of its life and the manner in which it enters the system are at present unknown; that it seems probable that it usually enters through the mouth and the mucous membrane of the nose, and it appears certain that it is directly communicated from man to man, and that other animals are not affected; that leprosy is, in fact, an infectious disease and not hereditary; that the worse the hygienic surroundings are, the greater is the danger of the disease spreading; that, so far, it has proved to be incurable; and, finally that the isolation of the affected, in leper houses or colonies, is the only safe method of preventing the spread of the disease. In the discussions on the subject, it was very clearly proved that the great preventative of leprosy is absolute cleanliness—a fact which is clearly emphasized in the ancient Mosaic ordinances—and also that in many cases, especially in the West Indies, the disease commences by a scratch, and then an ulcer, on the sole of the foot, which would appear to show that the bacillus of leprosy may be present in the soil and obtain entrance to the body by the direct infection of a broken surface.

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