

Medical Matters.

INSANITY IN AUSTRALIA.



IT is popularly supposed that the principal cause of insanity is intemperance. The experience of New South Wales, however, does not bear out this opinion. The amount of insanity directly due to drink, though certainly large, is not so considerable as that due to other causes. As far as the records of the Colonial hospitals show, the proportion of persons admitted, suffering from insanity traceable to intemperance, was not more than 9.99 per cent. of the total admissions for the ten years ending with 1896. Persons suffering from mania induced by excess of drink recover comparatively quickly, and at any one time their number in the hospitals for the insane is scarcely more than 5.5 per cent. The most potent cause appears to be hereditary influence. How far this is productive of insanity cannot, however, be exactly determined; for although the New South Wales Inspector-General of the Insane, a high authority on lunacy, has ascertained that hereditary influence and congenital defect can be credited with only 11.61 per cent. of the total insanity, this percentage gives no idea of the actual amount of hereditary insanity in the colony. Of the large number of patients, the causes of whose insanity is unknown, it is believed that in most instances the insanity is due to hereditary influence; and even in those cases where the primary cause of insanity has been ascertained, there is a strong presumption that many of the patients have inherited an insane neurosis.

TRANSFUSION.

THE old fashioned plan of transfusion of blood has almost ceased to be practised. It was of course only useful in cases of sudden and profuse external hæmorrhage where, in a young and healthy person, death was imminent from the mere loss of blood. In such cases, the injection, into the veins of the patient, of the arterial blood of a healthy person was often attended with the happiest results. But, at the same time, the difficulties were always great and sometimes insurmountable. Very frequently when the proper instruments were available, the rapid clotting of the blood entirely prevented the treatment being successful, although every other detail of the

process was perfectly carried out. So it was a great advance when it became recognized that what the blood vessels required was fluid and not necessarily pure blood; and the injection of hot water containing common salt in solution undoubtedly saved many lives and superseded the transfusion of blood. A further advance was made when it was discovered that the peritoneum possessed an extreme power of absorbing fluid, and so filling up the blood vessels, and in many cases of abdominal operation, when the patient seemed nearly at the point of death from extreme hæmorrhage, flushing the abdominal cavity with large quantities of warm salt water caused an almost immediate improvement in the pulse. Recently, the suggestion has been made that ordinary sea water would be the best possible fluid to inject in these cases. It contains of course, not only common salt in its purest form, but also other salts which are most valuable to the human economy. The theory has been put into practice, and a French physiologist has performed a series of experiments which seem to prove that sea water injections possess a remarkable antiseptic as well as vivifying effect in these cases. It is needless to say that the procedure requires further investigation and experience before ordinary sea water can be considered applicable, in all cases, for transfusion into depleted blood-vessels in human beings.

QUACK MEDICINES.

OUR influential contemporary, the *Medical Times*, is waging an active crusade against quacks. In a recent issue it has published a most amusing interview with the manager and the so-called medical adviser of the largely-advertised Munyon's system—a separate medicine for every disease, all at one shilling per bottle. The manager, it seems, admitted that he knew nothing of the remedies or of their composition—an innocence in which the medical adviser also shared. The latter gentleman flatly refused to reveal his identity, and waxed wroth when he was asked to produce proof of the wonderful cures the system is said to have wrought. But the cream of the interview was reached when the interviewer stated that analysis showed these marvellous medicines were chiefly composed of sugar and water, and when neither the manager nor the "medical adviser" were either able to deny this fact, nor to explain how so simple a remedy could produce such wonderful results!

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