

Medical Matters.

LANCING THE GUMS.



THIS is an old-fashioned procedure which still holds its own in the practical treatment of infants' disorders. It is remarkable how teething affects children, especially those born of delicate parents. The irritation of the gums, which is found in its most acute form in children with an hereditary predisposition to nerve troubles, often passes on from a mere local irritation into central nervous disorder; and so these children exhibit not only peevishness and irritability, but such evidence of nerve disturbance as attacks of squinting, and even of general convulsions. Or they may, from the same cause, even suffer from sudden loss of consciousness—in each case, the local irritation being the cause of the reflex disorder. It is clearly useless to treat such infants with drugs, while the cause continues; and the rapid and beneficial results which follow from lancing a red and inflamed gum, through which a tooth seems unable to force its way, are rarely forgotten by those who have once witnessed them. It is, indeed, a good general rule whenever an infant seems to be feverish and suffering, even although the gum may not seem to be seriously inflamed, to lance it over any tooth which seems to be coming to the surface; because, in some cases, the tissues over the crown of the tooth are so tough that although the gum shows but little signs of severe pressure, the tooth is unable to advance upwards.

THE PRE-DETERMINATION OF SEX.

SOME months ago, an immense amount of excitement was caused amongst the lay public by the announcement that Professor Schenck, of Vienna, had discovered a method whereby the sex of a foetus could be determined. Medical journals naturally have waited until the Professor published his researches upon the subject, before they exhibited much interest in the question. And it is almost needless to say that, now that he has done so, it is proved that he has comparatively little to add to the previous knowledge upon the subject. It may be briefly said that the first part of his book consists of a description of previous researches, which go to prove that the sex of the offspring is dependent upon the state of nutrition of the

parents, and chiefly that of the mother during pregnancy. This, to a large extent, has taken the place of the theory which formerly was much believed in—that the sex of the infant depended upon the ovary from which the impregnated ovum happened to come; a theory which long ago, however, in the early days of ovariectomy, was completely destroyed. Because, in many cases, after the removal of one ovary, the patient had both male and female children. Professor Schenck believes that the better nourished the mother is, the more likely she is to have a girl; and he states it as a fact that, if no trace of sugar can be found in the urine of the pregnant, then the foetus will be developed into a male. Practically, these are the entire results upon which so large an amount of popular excitement has been built. As an American contemporary puts it, it is something between the sublime and the ridiculous, to find that the researches that have attracted such an enormous amount of public attention “resolve themselves merely into a question of sugar.” Presuming, however, that Professor Schenck's conclusions are correct, and that the sex of the offspring is dependent to a large extent upon the dietary of the mother, it opens up a field of enormous importance to decide upon the proper amount of food and of exercise to be prescribed, in any given case.

PTOMAIN POISONING.

It is comparatively a modern discovery that various foods, especially meats, during the process of putrefaction, develop virulent poisons. To these, as they are presumably due to chemical decomposition of the muscular tissues, the name of Ptomaine has been given. The discovery undoubtedly explains cases which had previously been very obscure, in which, for example, whole families were attacked with more or less serious symptoms after a meal; some perhaps dying, others only recovering after a prolonged illness; yet ordinary analysis of the food of which they had partaken failed to show the presence of any known mineral or vegetable poison. The poison, in fact, in these cases is probably bacterial in its nature, being the result of putrefaction; a fact which explains the difficulty with which it has hitherto been recognized and treated. But now that these cases are understood, both prevention and treatment are rendered possible.

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