

Medical Matters.

NEGROES AND DISEASE.



CONSIDERABLE attention is now being given, especially in the United States, to the remarkable prevalence and fatality of certain diseases, amongst negroes. It is a fact well known in many English hospitals that the darker races appear to have no power of resistance to acute diseases—a fact well illustrated by the course of an attack of pneumonia occurring in two sailors, one British and the other a Lascar, from the same cause—exposure to wet and cold on a steamer in the Thames. Admitted together into the same hospital, receiving the same treatment, and the same care and attention, the Lascar will probably die within the week, or, if he survives the acute attack, the lung tissue will probably break down into cavities, and he will die within a month with the symptoms of acute consumption. The Englishman, on the other hand, will probably exhibit a higher temperature, and perhaps a greater surface of lung mischief, but the attack will follow a normal course, will gradually subside, and in due time he will completely recover. So amongst negroes, the acute fevers, especially small pox and measles, cause enormous mortality. And other diseases, such as cancer, which were formerly unknown amongst the black races, are now, it is reported, causing great and wide-spread ravages. It seems also that phthisis is becoming a devastating agent amongst American negroes, and the effects of disease generally are becoming so remarkable that it is even predicted by well-known observers that the negro population of the United States may, within a few years, die out altogether. There certainly seems some strange fatality, whereby the coloured races collapse when they come in contact with their whiter brethren. It cannot be due to sheer homicidal cruelty on the part of the latter, nor even to the destructive effects of imported alcohol, but probably arises, to a considerable extent, from the introduction, amongst races previously unacclimatized to them, of various diseases against which generations previously attacked have rendered the more civilised nations more or less constitutionally protected. This is excellently illustrated by an epidemic of measles—desperately fatal to Fijian Islanders—classed with teething amongst British mothers.

PHTHISIS.

SINCE the days when Professor Koch electrified the medical world by his alleged discovery of a certain cure for consumption, more or less scepticism has naturally been excited whenever a new remedy for the disease is proposed. But we are, at any rate, thus far advanced in our knowledge of Phthisis as to be aware that its progress is dependent upon the tubercle bacillus, and that this germ, like all others, can be destroyed by chemical means. Consequently, the great aim of the practical physician now is to discover an antiseptic sufficiently powerful to destroy the bacilli, and yet one which shall be harmless to the human organism. For some time, therefore, great hopes were built upon the action of creosote, which could be given to the patient in doses powerful enough to produce a marked effect upon the tissues, without endangering life. Since creosote was found to be inefficient in cases of consumption, many experiments have been made with similar products. Among these, Ichthyol has aroused many hopes. Given in the form of capsules, in small doses, and half an hour after meals, the most disagreeable feature of its administration—regurgitation—is largely prevented, and patients are found not only to take it well but in many instances to exhibit favourable results. It is stated that, under this treatment, the appetite and digestion are improved, the temperature is lowered, night sweats are lessened or entirely checked; and, above all, that the cough is diminished, and expectoration made easier and less abundant. These results are confirmed by various observers, and it is evident that the remedy, therefore, possesses considerable usefulness in the treatment of consumptive patients. At the same time, as we have already said, there is only too much reason for scepticism, and for believing that the drug in question will not prove to be a specific cure for this dreaded disease. Still, it is theoretically correct to employ antiseptics in the treatment of septic disease; and even if Ichthyol does not prove hereafter to be all that its advocates now claim for it, there can be little doubt that by its administration many patients are relieved; and it may prove to be a stepping-stone to the discovery of some other drug which will possess complete curative properties. It must be always remembered, also, that all drugs have greater effects now that they are associated with improved sanitary and common sense conditions, to the absence of which, formerly, much of the mortality must undoubtedly be ascribed.

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