

Medical Matters.

OLIVE OIL.



PROBABLY no article of diet is at present being used so largely for medicinal and surgical purposes as olive oil; and a valuable paper which has recently been written illustrates fresh methods in which its employment is expected to be beneficial. It is well known that, in the modern treatment of gall-stones, large doses of olive oil have proved to be most efficacious; and we have already shown in these columns that the probable explanation of this fact is, that, at the temperature of the body, the oil has a directly solvent action upon these calculi; that it passes through the stomach into the duodenum practically unchanged and is then probably sucked up the canal of the gall duct, to the point where this is constricted by a stone. There is even reason to believe that, when no stone is present, the oil may pass upwards into the gall bladder itself, and there exert its influence in diminishing the size of the contained calculi and so softening them that they can be with comparative ease squeezed out of the bladder and down the gall duct into the duodenum. This, which is the latest theory on the subject, certainly explains the remarkable manner in which patients who have suffered for years from repeated attacks of biliary colic are cured by large doses of olive oil. It has been pointed out that, in many cases, even of severe and persistent eczema the value of this oil as a medicine is very remarkable. Cases are reported, for example, in which, under its use, both internally and externally, not only eczema but other skin diseases have been rapidly cured; and it is an interesting fact that the effect of the treatment seems to be much increased if a large amount of fruit is added to the diet. The latest reports have shown that in cases in which the hair was falling out, from constitutional weakness, the administration of large doses of olive oil caused a speedy improvement, not only in the general strength and bodily nutrition, but also in the state of the scalp and the hair follicles, so that its growth became again strong and healthy. Finally, it has been shown that olive oil acts as a valuable antiseptic destroying germ life in the intestines; so that probably, in the near future,

it will be largely used as a medicine in that considerable class of cases which are known to depend upon intestinal fermentation.

ANÆSTHETICS.

THE apparent, if not actual, increase in the number of deaths under anæsthetics is naturally causing extreme interest to be taken in the matter, especially by those surgeons who do much operative work. It is noticeable that with rare exceptions death has only occurred when chloroform was employed, and that ether is comparatively free from catastrophes, while laughing gas remains, as it has always been, almost perfectly safe. In a recent paper upon this subject, it is stated that chloroform is seven times as powerful as ether, and is, therefore, more dangerous. The great reason, of course, for the continued popularity and use of this vapour is that it is so rapid and effective in its action, while it is certain that ether causes more disagreeable sensations than chloroform does, because of its irritating effects upon the mucous membranes of the throat and nose, and the peculiar feeling of suffocation which it induces. It is claimed that the reason for the greater fatality of chloroform is simply overdosage, and that the old-fashioned method, which was first adopted in Edinburgh, of giving only small doses, largely mixed with air was a more slow but an infinitely more safe method of administration than that which is at present so largely employed, and in which large quantities of chloroform are casually poured into an inhaler which is closely applied to the patient's face, and which therefore, renders it impossible for much air to be mixed with the vapour. Whatever the explanation may be, it is beyond dispute that such fatalities used to be rare, but that they now occur with a frequency which is quite startling, and which demands that the whole subject should be most carefully investigated. It is possible, of course, that impurities in the vapour may explain much of the mortality, but on the other hand, there is a very general belief amongst medical men that with a better system of administration much safer results would be obtained. The sooner the question can be authoritatively settled, the better will it be, because it is beyond dispute that for many reasons, especially in minor operations, chloroform is quite invaluable; and that it can be administered with a safety which is practically absolute, the experience of many years has proved.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)