

Medical Matters.**ANÆSTHETIC APPARATUS.**

A VALUABLE article on this subject was published last week in the *MEDICAL TIMES* by Mr. Belamy Gardiner. It has always been a golden rule in the practice of surgery that the implements used should be of the simplest possible pattern, consistent with efficiency. This rule holds good in no department of the art more strongly than in that of anæsthetic administration, the reason being easily demonstrable when the great variations in all the other conditions of an operation are brought to recollection. The simplicity of any instrument or appliance which is placed in our hands is always a guarantee that it is not liable to destruction and wear in the same manner and degree as a more complicated machine, which may itself be rendered useless by some slight strain. It is true that some men can, apparently, adapt themselves, or perhaps, more strictly, can adapt the operation, to the use of many complicated forms of surgical implement; but, in general, those whose skill is readiest, surest, and least affected by the external variations of their environment, are they who work with the fewest tools and rely the least on mechanical aid. In giving an anæsthetic, the practitioner is administering a drug and watching its physiological effect, he is not engaged in working a machine which, as a stoker, he feeds and leaves to do the rest. It should once for all be understood that the man who is unaware of the exact manner of working of an anæsthetic apparatus which he is employing, has not done his duty towards the patient under his charge, and is subjecting the latter to the gravest dangers. On the other hand, once the perfect knowledge of the simplest apparatus is attained, its use is no longer restricted; but assumes, in the hands of the skilled workman, all the attributes of many complicated engines, without their faults and breakdowns. Administering chloroform by pouring some of the liquid upon a handkerchief or towel would be employing the simplest possible apparatus, but the handkerchief and towel are not efficient apparatus. When they become wet, they need some kind of frame to support the moistened textures in order to avoid their contact with the patient's face. To combine efficiency with simplicity, a wire frame-work (known as Skinner's mask) with one layer of flannel stretched across it is

all that is required. Any more complicated apparatus than this is liable to distract the anæsthetist's thoughts, and thereby his skill, from the patient, whom he is studying, and with whose systemic peripheries he should be in constant touch. With regard to ether, the prevailing notion in the United Kingdom is undergoing a change, due to the involved and unwieldy instruments which are commonly employed to produce anæsthesia by its means. Many persons are under the mistaken impression that asphyxia and retention of carbonic acid gas in the air breathed is a necessary factor in its successful administration. Nothing could be more untrue, for ether can be well given by pouring it on a hollow sponge and narcotising the subject in the same way as with chloroform; its anæsthetic effect can be maintained for hours in this manner, and the use of an inhaling bag, as in Clover's and Ormsby's apparatus, is merely useful to prevent waste of ether and delay in the occurrence of complete narcosis. It is natural that specialists, in their endeavour to attain ideals and meet the stress and strain of the newest surgical advances in the present day, should employ complicated and expensive machines with which they can become perfectly familiar; but these are not the conditions of ordinary practice in this country, nor is it reasonable to expect the person who uses a violin once in a while ever to vie with him whose daily task makes it part of his very system. The man whose constant attention cannot be given to the subject of anæsthetics, but who has to use them at times, is undoubtedly acting wisely if he discards all thought of attaining better results by the use of any but the plainest and most familiar implements—those to which he is accustomed, and with which he is confident of procuring definite results. By all means, if he has any misgiving as to his technique, or the signs on which he is apt to rely, let him at once set these to rights; but not waste his money and time, nor shake his faith by trials with each new inhaler that may appear upon the market. These remarks are not intended in any way to minimise the importance of the developments which are yearly taking place in perfecting methods and apparatus in this department of surgery; but only to point out facts which the general practitioner will appreciate after he has been led to expect that some much advertised apparatus will overcome all dangers and difficulties in giving chloroform or ether, and has found that not only does it cause him greater anxiety, but, perhaps, also

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)