

Medical Matters.

A DISREGARDED SOURCE OF SURGICAL INFECTIONS.

It has long been recognised that saliva is an extremely dangerous medium of infection, but it has remained for de Leon to demonstrate just how frequently it may be responsible for the instances of so-called unavoidable surgical infection. From a long series of careful and well-controlled experiments, he has obtained some very striking results. It was found that on the average about 200 words were spoken by the operator alone in an ordinary operation. On an average, in each drop of saliva occur 4,375 bacteria, and in the duration of an average operation 250,000 organisms may gain direct entrance to the wound. Among these, virulent organisms are constantly present, streptococci, diplococci, and staphylococci, in order of their frequency. To avoid this source of contamination, de Leon devised a simple mouth mask which is efficacious and not burdensome, and does not interfere with distinct articulation. Some bacteria were found to penetrate a gauze mouth covering, though the number was materially reduced. If experience has shown that wounds are usually capable of withstanding a large number of bacteria, it has also demonstrated that under suitable conditions a few bacteria may give rise to serious and even fatal infection. Inasmuch as these conditions may obtain in any wound, the logical deduction is obvious. It would be folly, indeed, to strain at the gnat of saliva and swallow the camel of dirty hands, but surgeons who have good personal technique and equally careful assistants should consider this fruitful source of infection, particularly where teaching makes more continuous and louder talking a necessity.

PECULIAR FORM OF HAND INFECTION.

Two cases of a peculiar infection of the hands were reported in one of the medical journals recently that serve to emphasise the necessity of greater care of the hands on the part of both surgeons and nurses. The surgeon had been caring for several cases of acute suppurating conjunctivitis and one case of leg infection that ended in septicæmia. Both cases occurred in an index finger, that of the nurse following a prick of the finger made while lancing the hand of the surgeon. The clinical course of each was unusual, and in the case of the nurse gangrene ensued, necessitating ampu-

tation. During the acute period of the attack, but not later, there was obtained from each an organism that possessed all the characteristics of the Koch-Weeks bacillus. The writers are inclined to consider it as identical with, or a closely related type of, that organism.

DIPSOMANIA AND ITS TREATMENT.

Dr. Howard (in *Medical News*) considers dipsomania a functional neurosis, due to auto-intoxication from faulty metabolism, the result of an unstable nervous system. There is no scientific basis for the idea that it is a disease directly inherited. The author considers the following the rational treatment:—He first places the patient on a diet free from proteids, to avoid the formation of excessive quantities of soluble peptones and albumoses, which excite the nervous system. He then institutes an eliminative treatment, giving a daily mild natural water purgative and a Turkish bath twice weekly. After a time these measures may be used less frequently. He uses nitrate of strychnine continuously for a month, and renews it after a rest, continuing the administration for two years or more. At the time of an attack of dipsomania the strychnine is taken in doses of $\frac{1}{20}$ gr. every four hours. Breathing exercises are used to lessen sub-oxidation. There is no specific for the attacks; it is a physiological question under the control of the patient. Elimination is the watchword in the treatment.

SYMPTOMATOLOGY OF MORPHINISM.

In the *New York Med. Journ.* Dr. Douglas recalls some of the less known symptoms of morphinism. The first objective symptom is often languor and general debility in the morning. The patient is ill in the morning, well and even brilliant by night. He does his best work at night. At the same time he has a desire for food at night, and especially for sweet foods, candy, pie, cake, &c. Cigarettes are also grateful in plenty. Perfumes are desired. They are abnormally sensitive to cold, and do not love to bathe. They have poor memory and often misplace things. Procrastination is a common characteristic. The ethical side of the brain seems paralysed, and truthfulness is impossible. The moral symptoms are secondary to the physical suffering. The deleterious effects of morphine are dependent more on the length of time it is used than on the amount taken. Half a grain daily for ten years will produce more serious consequences than 10 grains daily for one year.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)