

Practical Points.

Who is responsible for the cleansing and disinfecting of our public telephones—or, indeed, for those used by hundreds of workers in houses of business or shops?

No trustworthy authority, as far as we can ascertain. We ask this question after reading an admirable paper on the "Dangers of Infection which Lurk in the Telephone," by Dr. R. S. Stanley, in the *Charlotte Medical Journal*, in which he considers the telephone an important factor in the causation of the diseases of tuberculosis, diphtheria, and syphilis. He says:—"As we all know, germs of disease come to the human system through the medium of food and drink, or through the air we breathe. With the consumptive the exertion of telephoning is apt to bring on a hacking cough.

This cough sends particles of the sputum flying into the transmitter of the telephone, to which they adhere till dried into dust. This dust is stirred up by subsequent users of the telephone, and is taken up through the mouth into the lungs. For it is the unfortunate habit of most people to remain at the telephone with parted lips while listening to the answers to their questions. This is, indeed, the natural and typical attitude of interested attention. It is, however, full of danger, for it allows an easy entrance to germs which otherwise would have been arrested in the nasal passages. A consumptive coughs up in twenty-four hours at least 200,000,000 germs. What fearful dangers may lurk in a telephone which has been used by one of these unfortunates!

It may be urged that consumptives would not be in a condition to use the telephone. It is far too often the case that employes in stores and offices (a class extremely liable to consumption, as statistics show) are forced by want of means to continue at their work, though consumptives, until the disease is far advanced. In the daily course of their duties they use the telephone constantly, and, as I have pointed out, charge the transmitter with germs which carry the disease to healthy persons who might otherwise have escaped.

With diphtheria the case is similar. Shreds of membrane are sometimes coughed up, charged with bacteria. Diphtheria is, it is true, mainly a disease of childhood under ten years of age, but may occur up to fifty years. Children are fond of using the telephone and are especially eager in their utterance, and so would charge the telephone with germs. The germs of diphtheria are long-lived, and cling to different objects with great tenacity. The telephone would readily harbour these insidious enemies of our health. Here, again, it may be noted that the greatest danger in the spread of diphtheria comes from ambulatory cases, in which symptoms are so slight as not to prevent the patient from going about. A mild case may thus beget severe or malignant cases in others. The bearing of this fact upon our present theme will readily be recognised by all.

Lastly, it may be noticed that the long distance telephone is most dangerous from another point of view. I have repeatedly noticed that on lowering the receiver spittle has trickled down into my mouth. Some previous user, taller than myself, has, in his eagerness of conversation, sputtered into the transmitter. The saliva of a syphilitic subject might thus be communicated to one with a slight abrasion of the

lips. The dreadful results which would follow may readily be conceived. A possible infection of innocent persons from this fearful disease in this manner should be carefully guarded against.

Dr. R. S. Stanley is convinced that there is danger of infection in the telephone. The strong and healthy may throw off the disease, repeated implantations of the germs may wear down the weak or those who through heredity are susceptible.

Physicians should urge consumptives and those suffering from diphtheria and syphilis to abstain from using the telephone, or else to use the utmost precaution that none of the sputum fly into the receiver. All should be advised to keep the mouth closed when at the telephone except when actually speaking. The words of Pasteur should be borne in mind: "It is in the power of man to cause all parasitic diseases to disappear from the world." To do this we must attack the germs in all their hiding places, and one such we believe the telephone to be.

Paper Milk Bottles. Paper milk bottles as a substitute for the glass bottles, which are cleaned and sterilised with difficulty, are not a new idea; but

they have not been adopted because, although every medical man is aware that the chief danger which lurks in milk is put there by the dirtiness of the milk's receptacles, it seems to have been worth nobody's while to make a bottle sufficiently cheap to be thrown away after being used once. Investigations by Dr. A. H. Stewart, of the Philadelphia Bureau of Health, indicate that a satisfactory "single service" paper milk bottle has been found. It is made of heavy spruce wood fibre paper, conical in shape so as to pack well, and with an ingenious locking device to retain the bottom. An important feature of the bottle is its saturation with paraffin at 212 deg. Fahr. The bottle is then baked. This sterilises it and prevents the milk from coming into contact with the paper sides of the bottle, which it does in the case of glass. For shipment the bottles are packed in nests of twenty, and the nests, and the bottoms of the bottles, packed separately, are placed in sterilised bags. Bacteriological tests with the bottles were extremely satisfactory. As received from the manufactory none contained micro-organisms. Closed bottles were sent to several dairies near Philadelphia, and a glass bottle and a paper bottle were filled from the same lot of milk. When received again at the Health Bureau the glass bottles always showed leakage round the caps; the paper bottles did not. In every instance the milk in the paper bottle contained fewer bacteria than did that in the glass bottle. The average was in general one-fourth. Certified milk in the paper bottles kept sweet two days longer than in the glass bottles. The cost of the bottles is so small that they may be used without increasing the price of milk to the consumer; and they are light, tightly sealed, perfectly clean and sterile.

To Deaden Sound.

Mr. E. Cresswell Baber describes in the *Lancet* some little ear plugs made for him by Messrs. Lynch and Co., 15, Silver Street, London, E.C. They are made in several sizes, and must fit the meatus. They are prescribed as a protection against loud sounds, such as firing, and have a decidedly deadening effect.

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