

Medical Matters.

SAND BATHS.

The *British Medical Journal*, reviewing an article by Dr. Boutin in a Bordeaux medical journal, says:—

Dr. Boutin indicates the uses of baths of sea-sand for various affections. Speaking generally, hot sand seems to act in the same way as hot water or vapour, only more energetically, and with the additional advantage of the iodides and bromides of the sea-water with which it is saturated. Sand baths may be administered at any time and in any locality, but their effect is much more satisfactory when they are taken on the seashore itself, in sand heated by the direct rays of the sun. The temperature is then more uniform, and the mineral constituents of the sand run no risk of being decomposed or otherwise altered by the action of artificial heat. At Royan, where Boutin has made his observations, he has found that the temperature of the dry sand is 6 degrees or 7 degrees C. (12 degrees or 13 degrees F.) higher than that of the surrounding air. On July 1st, 1908, with the general temperature standing at 73 degrees F., the wet sand registered 85 degrees and the dry sand 87 degrees, at 11 o'clock in the morning. Two hours later, the readings were respectively 80 degrees, 92 degrees, and 94 degrees, and after that time the sand bath was ready to be taken with a maximum of efficacy. The patient's head must be covered with a large straw hat or shaded by an umbrella, and if the bath includes the whole body, the face should be bathed occasionally with fresh water. Towards the end of the time, moreover, the pulse, respiration, and general condition of the patient should be carefully observed, and the treatment discontinued at the first sign of faintness, vertigo, or dizziness. After a hot sand bath the skin may be wiped down at once, and the sudorific action continued in bed; or the patient may proceed to a sea bath or a douche of fresh water, in which case a little brisk exercise should follow. The sand bath may be taken cold or hot, moist or dry, but cold sand baths are always moist. In employing these the cold wet sand takes the place of the wet sheet in a pack, and it is not of long duration. It is used in cases where there is sufficient reaction and no organic lesion, principally in some nervous affections, such as hysteria and neurasthenia; Hot moist sand favours the determination of blood to the skin and the relief of internal congestion; it also opens the pores of the skin to admit the alkaline iodides and bromides of the sea-water with which the sand is impregnated. These baths have been found

useful in ganglionic enlargements of doubtful origin, and for such they have chiefly been prescribed. A bath of hot, moist sand can be borne for a longer time than a water bath of the same temperature; the skin does not redden so much as in water, nor does it become shrivelled. It should be followed by dry rubbing of the skin and by exercise to avoid chill. Dry hot sand baths are those which are found most generally useful; they stimulate perspiration, and their action is very like that of hot air. Free diaphoresis results with a temperature of 30 degrees to 40 degrees C. (86 degrees to 104 degrees F.), and it is not often necessary to go higher. If this temperature should not be reached by ordinary sun heat, local baths may be had by warming the sand artificially, or the sun's rays may be concentrated on the particular tract of sand desired, by means of portable burning glasses, and a higher temperature thus obtained. Such baths may be used in rheumatism, gout, obesity, intoxications of lead, morphine, or mercury, neurasthenia, spinal curvature, and the like.

THE SIGNS OF DEATH.

The same journal calls attention to a monograph by Dr. Icard, Paris, on "The True Sign of Death in the Doctor's Absence." He points out that with all signs used up to the present time skilled help has been necessary for the demonstration or reading of the various signs of death, and that it is exactly in those cases in which it is impossible to obtain the assistance of a doctor that there is a need for some test which will be both simple and easy of application and at the same time infallible. In the reaction which he terms the *réaction sulfhydrique*, Dr. Icard considers he has found such a test. The putrefactive action of anaerobic bacteria only becomes evident when life is extinct, and one of the first evidences of their activity is the evolution of sulphuretted hydrogen gas, and its presence in the gases coming off from the nose or the mouth is proof positive in temperate or hot climates of death having occurred. The author tests for sulphuretted hydrogen by placing either a silver coin or a piece of paper moistened with neutral acetate of lead over the nostrils of the body. If life is still present, no sulphuretted hydrogen will come off and no change will take place in the coin or paper; but if life is extinct, then, in the course of a few hours, the coin or paper will become blackened. This test, he avers, never fails, and it is evident that it is not only simple in its method of application, but definite in its results, and can be used and understood by the most ignorant.

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