

Medical Matters.

PREPARATION OF THE SKIN FOR OPERATION.

In its review of the *Annus Medicus*, 1910, the *Lancet* says:—

The preparation of the skin for operation has ever since the introduction of antiseptic surgery been looked upon as of vital importance, and inasmuch as sterilisation by heat is here impossible we have to trust to mechanical cleansing and to the use of antiseptics. The practice has certainly varied greatly in different parts of the world, and even in the hospitals of the same city, but it has for the most part consisted in the application for 12 hours or more of a compress moistened with some antiseptic after thorough washing of the operation area. This method, though of very definite value, is not free from objections; in the first place, it is not at all rare to find the skin inflamed by the compress, and in some cases the irritation may be great; a further objection is that the method is inapplicable to emergency operations, for sufficient time is not available. Nearly 50 years ago Dr. Boinet wrote in favour of iodine as a local application in surgery. In 1906 Dr. Chassevant recommended the use of a solution of iodine in chloroform of the strength of 1 part in 15 for the disinfection of the skin. Dr. Grossich has also employed the tincture of iodine for the same purpose. In the *Lancet* Mr. H. F. Waterhouse and Mr. W. Stephen Fenwick described the method employed at Charing Cross Hospital. At first the iodine was applied only after thoroughly washing with soap and water and the employment of an antiseptic solution, but the results were unsatisfactory, till it was found that the preliminary washing was not only unnecessary but a positive hindrance to the penetration of the iodine. When the washing of the part was omitted the action of the iodine was very satisfactory, and most of the incisions healed by first intention. The best strength of the iodine solution had then to be determined; an 8 per cent. solution was at first employed, but it was found to cause much irritation, and later a 2 per cent. solution was used, and with the results of this strength they were quite satisfied. They lay stress on the importance of using rectified spirit as the solvent, for if the iodine is dissolved in methylated spirit the eyes of the surgeon and his assistants are liable to suffer. Mr. Waterhouse paints the operation surface first two hours before the operation, and again on the operating table. Many surgeons are now employing iodine in much the same way, but various modifications are used. A slightly weaker solution is equally efficacious, and one painting immediately be-

fore the operation appears to be successful. The value of iodine as a disinfectant has long been recognised, and Mr. Paul Reclus has called attention to the great value of iodine in the treatment of wounds of the hand. In the hands of workmen the skin is often thick and covered with a crust of grease and dust, and it is very difficult to sterilise the skin, but if tincture of iodine is applied direct to the wound and its margins rapid healing is the rule. It is worthy of note that in the Russo-Japanese war tincture of iodine was largely used, and this was one of the causes of the success of the treatment of wounds in that war.

A TRIUMPH OF SCIENCE.

By the discovery of the *Stegomyia calopus*, the mosquito which carries the yellow fever parasite, and is its sole transmitter from man to man, the immediate and future effect upon the commerce and civilisation of Central and Southern America, is inestimable. An effect which can only be realised by those who have known the awful devastation caused by these winged messengers of death, devastation which took its first toll of the followers of Columbus. "It is," says the *Times South American Supplement*, "as if, by the hands of the Conquistadores of science, a weight of terror had been lifted from these beautiful and fertile lands where heretofore men travelled and traded at peril of their lives. In all the wonderful records of scientific discovery, few stories appeal so strongly to the imagination as this, the story of the second conquest of the New World by the microscope. What fairy tale could be more incredible than the fact that the patient labours of scientists, dissecting the stomachs of mosquitoes, have done more for commerce and civilisation in the tropics than railways, canals, and all the manifold activities of human energy?"

"Foremost among the great triumphs of science, this discovery of the cause and of the means of prevention of yellow fever deserves the admiration and gratitude of humanity."

Recently at Ancon in the Canal zone, a memorial was unveiled to the memory of those who, like Dr. Lazear, lost their lives in order 'that the curse of hideous pestilence might be lifted for ever from this land.' Several of these brave volunteers were young soldiers of the United States Army, one was a Baltimore nurse; of these, the dedication service rightly testified that 'but for their heroic services, the gaps in our ranks would be far wider and deeper than they are, and life here would be denied that sense of safety, that assurance of health protection, without which there can be no peace of mind or contentment.'

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