

Communications.

THE following remarks form part of an editorial in the January number of the London *Lancet*:

"The most acceptable sort of communication is that which is based on numerous and well-observed clinical facts having a practical or therapeutical significance. We retain our strong faith in medicine—we mean in the administration of well-selected drugs. We are not converts to the mint-water treatment of acute rheumatism. If we have lately made fresh discoveries of the curative powers of nature, we have also made fresh discoveries of the curative powers of medicine. To go no further back than our impression of last week, can anything be more remarkable than the profound effects on the nervous system of *Gelsemium sempervirens* detailed by Dr. Sydney Ringer and Mr. William Murrell? Is it conceivable that such powers should not have applicability to the temporary aberrations of nerve-function which constitute so much of the disease that comes before us? Where is the justification of speaking disparagingly of medicine, when it reduces temperature; when it dilates a pupil or contracts it; when it removes pain as by a magical process; when it alters the complexion and the composition of the blood; when it modifies the capacity of the cavities of the heart and the calibre and the contents of the various tubes of the body, such as the bronchi or the bowels or the blood-vessels; when it removes nodes; when it stops hæmorrhage, or alters in twenty-four hours the whole aspect of a skin eruption; when it suspends indefinitely epileptic seizures; and when it induces sleep? When medicine can be shown palpably to have such powers, it is but reasonable to expect year by year the discovery of new uses of it in the treatment of disease. Accordingly we shall look with a kindly feeling on all communications with a therapeutical bearing. It is unnecessary to say that we want no hasty inferences or false conclusions. It is easy to go wrong in estimating the therapeutical action of drugs; but of late the tendency to error has been rather in the direction of undervaluing medicines than of

overestimating them. It is also superfluous to add that, as we should prize, most of all, communications showing modes of treatment that evidently curtail the duration of illness and the amount of pain, we should value as little inferior to these in importance papers which would show the fallacy of any accepted views or fashions of practice. We all fall more or less into routine modes of treatment, and no exercise is more beneficial to us as physicians than that we should be our own critics to test in all lights and ways the soundness of the conclusions we have arrived at and of the details of the treatment which we practise. Not the least advantage of such an attitude towards our own practice is that it makes practice so much more interesting. The most ordinary case of illness methodically studied—which, by the way, can be done with very little fuss or loss of time—becomes a lesson to us more instructive than mere books."

VACCINATION.—ITS EFFICACY.

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THIS question has lately been the subject of considerable discussion, not only in the Old World, where the opponents of vaccination have been assuming a rather bold front in their resistance to the law, which compels its adoption at a certain date after the birth of every child, but in this country. That such opposition should occur to a limited extent, at least, is not surprising. As men are at present constituted, the unanimous acceptance of any principle the correctness of which admits of even the *shadow* of a doubt, would be a singular phenomenon. Vaccination as an expedient for the prevention of variola, or for the mitigation of its severity, has been on its trial for seventy-five years and upwards; and to the great mass of civilized society it has commended itself as worthy of all the importance attached to it. But Dr. George Gregory's prediction, "that, in proportion as small-pox subsided, and its terrors became less known, so vaccination would be less regarded as necessary, or, perhaps, might fall into disrepute," is just now receiving its fulfilment, not only in Europe, but in this country