

cretion in this direction, simply from the fact of being allowed to partake, and often in excessive quantity, of everything which appears on the table. Under such circumstances it is not hard to understand how the delicate and undeveloped stomach of the child should revolt, sooner or later, against a diet totally out of proportion to its powers of digestion, and capable of exciting a diarrhoea which is often both toxic and mechanical in its nature.

The above facts direct attention to the most common cause of this intestinal affection in children and to a consideration of the remedies in vogue for its cure.

Of medicinal agents there are probably none so harmful in effect and yet so frequently and carelessly administered as opium.

If we accept the almost universal view that the summer diarrhoea of infants is toxic in character, we are defeating our own ends in giving opium at all except as a last resort. The tendency in this affection is nearly always towards natural recovery, the frequent movement of the bowels simply an effort to rid themselves of irritant material, and why should we retard that object?

The evil effects of opium are evidenced in many ways. By its stimulating effects on the inhibitory fibres of the splanchnic nerves it lessens intestinal action, allowing the retention of decomposition products, and accumulation and absorption into the general circulation of toxic material. At the same time it of necessity disorders digestion in the stomach, which is already deranged, for be the dose however small, if it is sufficient to produce any constipating effect on the intestines it must also indirectly influence the stomach. In addition to this, if given in overdose, or its use continued too long, it paralyzes the inhibitory fibres of the splanchnics, and as a result of the withdrawal of the natural restraining influence on the intestinal walls, increased peristalsis ensues, and an aggravated condition of the original trouble is produced. Thus in the administration of opium, not only are we combatting the natural effort on the part of the gastro-intestinal tract to rid itself of foreign and irritating material, but we lock up the secretions of those glands whose duty it is to provide juices which are necessary for intestinal digestion, and for a medium antagonistic to the development of bacteria.

It may be argued that opium might be justifiably used in small doses, provided evacuation and cleanliness of the bowels have been secured. Even with initial catharsis and thorough irrigation of the tract, can we be sure that some irritating material has not remained, to find the most favorable possible ground for toxic development, in the condition of arrested motion of the bowels induced by the exhibition of opium?