

NOTES ON HOUSEHOLD DISINFECTION BY FORMALDEHYDE.

*Paper read in the Section of Pathology and Bacteriology,
at the Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association held in
Montreal, September, 1897.*

By **WYATT JOHNSTON, M.D.**

Bacteriologist to the Board of Health of the Province of Quebec (in
collaboration with D. D. McTaggart, M.D.)

DURING the past year the use of formaldehyde as a disinfectant has been greatly increased in America, its efficacy having largely become known through the work of Dr. J. J. Kinyoun and Professor F. O. Robinson. It is astonishing how little we actually know of what actually happens in the ordinary routine disinfection of rooms by different methods in comparison with our knowledge of what happens under more rigid experimental conditions. It seemed that devising simple and fairly uniform methods of testing room disinfection which would enable it to be done by the ordinary sanitary officials in the regular course of their duties, important information could be obtained which would be of service in making a choice of methods.

I have designed a little outfit for use by the Board of Health of the Province of Quebec for this purpose, in which by having the infected test objects (small bits of rubber bands dipped in bouillon culture) placed in muslin packets of distinctive colours, the degree of penetration of steam or disinfectant vapours can be tested by an unskilled person (a red packet is exposed near source of disinfectant, a yellow packet is exposed far from source of disinfectant, a green packet is covered lightly or placed in a pocket, a blue packet is covered deeply in a blanket roll or in a mattress). The packets to go in an envelope marked with blank spaces for details as to cubic space, amount of disinfectant used, etc., and can be sent by post. The use of colours and a small metal fastening for the packets also enables any bleaching or tarnishing effects to be detected. These were invariably present with sulphur fumigation, never with formaldehyde. During the past year, a good deal of disinfection of elegant private houses has been done by us. No injury whatever has been reported from formalin. In planning the test outfit, valuable advice was received from Dr. W. H. Park (New York). Practically these test outfits were found to