

are we to suppose that an invisible germ of disease can pass on from stage to stage unaffected by the putrefaction of sewage and the action of air. We must believe, for the present, that it was not so. In water we see perfect purification, nitrogen itself being lost.

In ordinary putrefaction, sulphuretted hydrogen comes off in abundance, with much carbonic acid and some nitrogen. Oxygen resists this action, and if the oxygen is supplied in a concentrated condition a change takes place; nitrogen is evolved as the principal gas, and a decomposition of nitrogen compounds takes place. Nitrogenous bodies are thus destroyed—in one manner by their voluntary putrefaction, in another by oxidation. Up to a certain point, not determined, the greater the amount of nitrogenous bodies the more rapid is their decomposition.

The oxygen of the nitrate passes in part to the carbon; some will be retained, forming a carbonate. I have not estimated how much, or if all, is to be taken by the carbon.

If the solution is weak, the nitrogen takes up the oxygen, and does not allow it to pass away, thus forming nitrates.

Putrefaction and oxidation are two well-known modes of destroying organic bodies at ordinary temperatures. The second is not proved to be connected with organisms.

How far, then, can oxidation, or a great supply of air, be employed to destroy putrefaction, or to purify?

The bearing it has on the analysis of water will be clearly seen by chemists. The bearing on the sewage question is also interesting. Substances and living things may be carried by the rapid sewage system into the range of a new activity before undergoing that putrefaction which breaks them up in proximity to us or in the sewers themselves. It seems to point to a plan of causing the destruction of organisms by putrefaction and subsequent oxidation or by chemical action. At least, it seems to me that we require to learn if it be true that any of the germs of disease, or which germs of disease, will live in an abundance of good air. We

know that abundant dilution will render them all ineffective. It is probable that there will be a difference amongst them in this respect, whilst all will yield to the double action of—first, putrefaction, and then oxidation.

Certainly at least this is one of the conditions, and now we may ask what is the character of these changes evolved in the word decomposition? I have said the bodies arising from the decomposition may be very numerous; if so, the modes of decomposition must be very numerous, and the term used, viz., putrefaction, cannot represent only one chemical change. There is one stage of it, however, which seems to be more efficient in breaking up the compounds than any other, and this takes place when the sewage has a certain amount of air allowed to it. How much is not very clear, but there is evidently a limit. Within that limit thorough putrefaction begins, organic substances rapidly disappear, and gases in great abundance come from them. Carbon and hydrogen, sulphur and nitrogen, each in its own way, either in combination, as the carbon, for example, always is, or as bodies perfectly free. It is this grand breaking up foetid organic matter which nature has contrived in order to, reduce purification, otherwise this city (Glasgow) would be sending down its river such loads of impurity as even that willing stream would scarcely be able to bear. I wish, therefore, to bring forward now more emphatically the doctrine that putrefaction in a certain stage is one of the greatest of purifiers, and perhaps the most complete that nature has devised. It has often been asked what will become of those many poisonous emanations which arise from the human body even in health, and from those still more dangerous substances which are generated within it during many of these multifarious diseases to which man is subjected. The germ theory of disease has caused alarm in many directions, and it has been imagined that some little germ of disease passing into a sewer or pure river might carry with it power to infect other organisms to such an extent that there was reason to fear for the lives of all inhabitants on its banks. This extreme appli-