

Earth Closets.

The water closet, although a very convenient and almost indispensable appendage to a first-class residence, is open to many objections, arising from carelessness in its management, freezing of pipes, etc., which are too well known to need specification. The earth closet, improved as it has been already, and doubtless will be, is destined, if we mistake not, to prove a formidable rival to the water closet.

The general principle which gives value to the earth closet is the power of earth to deodorize decaying and decomposed organic matters. This is due partly to its absorbent power upon gaseous compounds, and partly to chemical reaction, between the substances of which earth is composed and the offensive matters. The absorbent power of earth upon effluvia has been long known. In rural districts the practice of burying clothes to rid them of smell caused by too intimate contact with that personally disagreeable, but to hop-growers exceedingly useful little animal, the skunk, is a common practice. It is well known that excrementitious matters, covered with dry earth, are not only completely deodorized, but form the most valuable of all known fertilizers.

The mechanical construction of earth closets, as they are now made, is such, that by a very simple movement, matters deposited therein are instantaneously covered with a layer of dry earth, and, thus deodorized, may be removed with as little offense or trouble as ashes.

The plan is commendable in many points of view. On shipboard its introduction would obviate the most intolerable nuisance. In hospitals it would greatly promote the health and comfort of both patients and their attendants. It is equally applicable to dwelling houses, wherever situated, and under any circumstances whatever, and is as applicable to a commode as to a room set apart for the purpose. It removes all danger of impregnation of wells with excrementitious matters, an accident now of frequent occurrence, and the cause of frightful epidemics.

Its universal adoption would lessen the demand upon the water supply of cities to a very large extent—an important consideration. It can be made convenient in use, and lastly, but not by any means least, such a system might be made to restore to lands the large amount of valuable fertilizing matters which now flow through the sewers of seaboard towns to contaminate the waters for miles around.

The value of this now wasted sewerage is enormous. It may be estimated in millions annually. Engineers have racked their brains to devise some means of utilizing this waste; it seems to us that the earth closet is the true method for its accomplishment. Not that we believe the principle has been yet wrought out to perfection, but that it is capable of being applied so as to cover all the requirements of the case.

Our attention was first called to this subject by the perfect absence of smell, and the superior cleanliness of the earth closets of the Oneida community, an association which, whatever its errors of belief, is not open to any criticism on the score of cleanliness. These closets are daily cleaned, without inconvenience, by simply drawing away the earth and deodorized matter with the receptacle allotted

to them, and replacing it by another. The compost is used on their lands, and is considered an extremely valuable manure.

We are glad to see that public attention is being directed to this matter on both sides of the Atlantic, and we trust the subject will be discussed, and the matter tested until its merits are fully established. A patent is pending at the Patent Office now on a very ingenious earth closet, the invention of an Englishman. As soon as the patent issues we shall probably illustrate the subject in these columns.—*Scientific American*.

Concerning the Obstetrical Properties of Ergot of Rye.

M. Ameville presented the following case, which gave rise to a discussion upon the properties of the ergot of rye, in the *Société Medico-Pratique de Paris*:

On the 24th of last May, I was called by a midwife to see a lady, thirty years of age, large, strong, and a primipara. Two hours after the child was delivered, the placenta not having come away, the midwife had administered some ergot of rye; but instead of producing thereby the expulsive pains she had expected, the uterine contractions confined themselves to the muscular fibres of the neck, which closed completely. When I arrived the child had been delivered about five hours. The os would admit only with difficulty the end of the finger; the introduction of the hand to reach the placenta was not to be thought of. Both the midwife and family were greatly alarmed, because from time to time there were slight discharges of blood; and the midwife, fearing a hæmorrhage, did not dare leave the patient. Having in the first place reassured their minds, I ordered that an injection of tepid water be made upon the neck of the uterus for eight or ten minutes, and that this be repeated if necessary at the end of an hour. I returned two hours after and found that the spasm of the neck had almost entirely yielded, and that the os was supple and sufficiently dilated to admit the end of the hand shaped into a cone. I therefore gradually produced complete dilatation, and having introduced the hand and detached the placenta, which was still adherent at one of its edges, I completed the labor.

I cite this case, to demonstrate to you once more the impropriety of administering ergot of rye in certain circumstances, in which, on the contrary, direct intervention should be resorted to; and also how its administration may hinder, at least momentarily, the performance of the necessary procedure; and again, to show the influence of tepid injections upon dilatation of the os.—*L'Union Médicale*, No. 24, 1869.—*Buffalo Medical Journal*.

—Professor Nickels, of the Academy of Science of Nancy, in France, recently met his death in a very peculiar manner—by accidentally inhaling the vapor of concentrated hydrofluoric acid, while engaged in making experiments to isolate flourine. Professor Nickels was the author of many valuable published scientific works.—*Medical and Surgical Reporter*.