

Correspondence.

LETTER FROM LONDON.

LONDON, JUNE, 1891.

Dear M,—Many changes have occurred in the technique of antiseptic surgery since I left London thirteen years ago, and nowhere are these more striking than in the practice of Sir Joseph Lister himself. As you know, he has given up the use of the spray entirely, and the old-fashioned carbolised gauze has also vanished.

The dressing used now is the "double cyanide gauze"; the antiseptic employed is a double cyanide of mercury and zinc, which was fully described some time ago in a clinical lecture by Lister, which appeared in the medical journals. The first specimens of the gauze were undyed, but it was found advisable to color it, and it is now made of a pale magenta color. This serves to distinguish it from plain gauze, or from gauze simply sterilized by heat and unimpregnated with any antiseptic, which is used to a large extent in some hospitals. But it is a curious fact that the dye is useful in another way. It has an affinity for the gauze on one hand and for the double salt of zinc and mercury on the other, so that it helps to fix the latter in the gauze and has overcome one defect in it, viz., a tendency for the salt to fly off as a fine dust from the gauze when dry. In addition, the gauze is kept slightly damp: it is squeezed out of a solution of carbolic acid (the old 1 to 20 solution) and wrapped in mackintosh cloth. This gauze is never moistened in a mercurial solution. It has been ascertained that the ordinary solution of perchloride of mercury forms a sort of triple salt with the double cyanide, and this new compound is quite inert as an antiseptic. This then is the method now followed of dressing an operation wound:—the sutures having been inserted and drainage tube fixed in place, a layer of the gauze, freshly soaked in a 1-20 solution (5% sol.) of carbolic acid, is laid over the area of operation, then several layers of the gauze, simply damp as taken from its mackintosh wrappings, and finally a bandage. The skin before operating is cleansed with the "strong solution," that is, a solution of carbolic acid 1 to 20, to which perchloride of mercury has been added in the proportion of 1 to 500. The solution used for irrigating the wound, which is usually done by squeezing sponge upon it, is a weak solution of 1-1000 of the perchloride of mercury.

Sir Joseph speaks very highly of the use of Barker's "flushing gouge" in treating chronic abscesses, as those connected with the bodies of the vertebrae. The results of its use in his wards have been very satisfactory; the duration of the convalescence being greatly diminished. Sir Joseph remarked in discussing tuberculosis, that in his own practice he has seldom witnessed the generalisation of tubercle of the operation, as for instance meningitis occurring in a child after removal of a tubercular joint, still there could be no doubt it occurred; and great care should be taken to remove the disease completely. He spoke very highly of the application of undiluted carbolic acid to the walls of small abscesses, or to the serrated surfaces of bones in cases of tubercular disease, where complete removal by knife or sharp spoon was doubtful. He has adopted a slight modification of the method of administering chloroform: it is dropped, *guttatim*, continuously, from a drop bottle upon the folded towel. I may perhaps be mistaken, but I fancy there is a reaction setting in from the almost wholesale condemnation of chloroform, and equally foolish over-laudation of ether. The example of the Scottish schools which have gone calmly on administering chloroform *ad libitum*, with a minimum of accident, is not without effect. I saw very many things of much interest in the practice of Sir Joseph Lister, of which I cannot write now and to me it was a very great pleasure to go round the wards again with my old chief, whose beautiful enthusiasm; clear scientific insight, and benign sympathy for the poor and suffering are still the same as when one, who owed much to him, well sang:

"We held him for another Herakles
Warring with Custom, Prejudice, Disease
As once the son of Zeus with death and hell."

I must not take leave of King's College Hospital without remarking upon the excellent work done there by Watson Cheyne, whose name is familiar to us all as among the foremost of the younger European pathologists, but who also has demonstrated his ability as a brilliant operative surgeon. Mr. Cheyne's clinic is among the most valuable in London, and his class is a very large one. His methods are characterised by great simplicity, and nothing in the shape of an operation seems to stagger him. He is still continuing his researches on Koch's method, and is to read a paper at the forthcoming meeting of the British Medical Association, which I think, will be of great interest.