

At a recent meeting of the Societe Medicale des Hospitaux of Paris, M. Lebar reported the following case: A soldier, aged twenty-three years, was in a trench in Argonne which was blown up by a mine. He was projected into the air and fell, and was covered by a mass of earth, from which he succeeded in extricating himself. The detonation was such that he immediately became deaf. This was attributed to double hemorrhagic labyrinthitis by M. Cousteaud, who subsequently examined him. The deflagration of the powder produced superficial burns of the face, and there were several bruises on the head, which were greatest on the left side. He was taken to the English hospital at Arc-en-Barrois, where on the following day he noticed, to his surprise, tufts of white hair on the left side of the head. These formed four "islets" in the left fronto-parieto-occipital region separated from one another by normal hairs. The loss of color was complete from the roots to the ends of the hairs and the longest hairs were just as white as the shortest. There was not a brown hair amidst them. The grey hairs were solidly implanted and could be pulled out only by strong traction. The bulbar swelling of the hair was equally decolorised. After the accident the patient suffered from incessant twitching of the left eyelids. The rest of the hair of the head was dark brown and there was not a white hair in the beard or moustache. The patient was an intelligent man, and the truth of his story was confirmed by the fact that his hair was described in his "livret militaire" as "marron foncé." The mechanism of sudden loss of color of the hair is not well understood. It might be suggested that in this case it was due to bleaching by gases generated by the explosion, but this was negatived by the fact that the intracutaneous parts of the hair were decolorised like the rest. The studies of Metchnikoff on the whitening of the hair due to age throw light on the question. According to him, when a hair begins to whiten there appear in the cortex round or oval cells with prolongations which gradually come into relation with the cells containing the pigment granules and absorb them. These "pigmentophages," as he calls them, then descend toward the root of the hair to scatter in the dermis, of which they are, according to him, the pigmentary cells. The pigmentophages, which originate in the medulla of the hair, disappear completely when the decoloration of the hair is achieved. This theory explains a slow and progressive decoloration of the hair of senility, and also applies to the rapid loss of color now under consideration. This rapid mobilization of the medullary cells appears to be provoked by a nervous disturbance. The place of whitening seems to be determined by the points on the scalp which have been the seat of injury.