

QUESTIONS OF MEDICAL SECRECY.

Two questions relating to the observance of professional secrecy have lately been discussed in France. The first was as follows:—Should a medical man reveal to a mother the fact that her daughter is syphilitic? On the one hand it was maintained that if the girl consults the practitioner on her own account he is absolutely bound to secrecy. On the other hand it was held that if the mother brings the girl—who is very probably a mere child—to the practitioner, he has to consider that she is not likely to appreciate the gravity of the disease or the risks of contaminating other members of the family as well as her mother can, and his own common sense must guide him under the circumstances of the particular case as to whether it may not be for the patient's own advantage as well as for that of the family to explain matters to the mother. The other question relates to a case which has recently occurred. A practitioner having been sent for to a family whose regular attendant he was, became a witness of a violent scene between husband and wife, terminating in acts of cruelty. He withdrew without giving any professional advice or any prescription. Subsequently he was summoned to give evidence in a court of law in connection with a demand for legal separation of the husband and wife, but refused, claiming that he was bound to professional secrecy, which, it must be remembered, is more obligatory, from a legal point of view, in France than in this country. The court, however, did not admit the plea and fined him 10 francs. In view of an appeal against this he asked for the opinion of his professional brethren as to his action. Different views were expressed, some holding that what he saw was not a secret confided to him as a medical adviser, for in fact he was not acting in a professional capacity at all and therefore could only have been an ordinary witness, while others thought that having been for a long time the family professional confidant and having been sent for as a medical man he was bound not to divulge what he knew, especially as he might have been pressed in the witness box to mention circumstances which had come under

his notice in previous visits which had been strictly professional. Doubtless, too, it was urged, it would create a bad precedent if it were established that one of two disputants might send for a medical man simply for the purpose of ensuring the presence of a witness to some *fracas*, for this would be a degrading position for a medical man, whose work is certainly not that of a professional witness. The case, as a matter of fact, came to no definite conclusion, being withdrawn by the parties themselves. *Lancet*.

FEEDING THE SICK.

To provide a sick person with nutritious food of proper quality and quantity is one of the most important requirements of nursing. Not all cases of sickness call for the observance of asepsis and antiseptics; medicines may be used sparingly or not at all, and the principles of hygiene may be so well known by the household that the nurse is relieved from care on that score; but the problem of diet is ever present. What may the patient eat is a question that constantly presents itself to the nurse.

It is well known that drugs cannot take the place of food. They only rally vital forces for a time, or else, by modifying circulation, restrain the consumption of materials previously supplied by food. Generally they act either as a whip or a check, and soon become useless; when the function of nutrition is disregarded.

Not only is the feeding of the sick an important matter because of its relation to vital processes, but it is a difficult one. The skill and knowledge requisite for scientific feeding cannot be gained in a day, and from what we have seen and heard of the various training schools for nurses this branch of instruction does not in all cases receive the attention which its importance merits. Many physicians, too, feel a lack of knowledge in this matter, and happy indeed is he who finds a trained nurse capable of formulating the patient's menu. Many of our larger hospitals now have diet kitchens, and it would be well indeed if every training school in the land had a well-equipped laboratory for the study of foods and their preparation.