

Miscellaneous.

DISINFECTANTS.

As the summer weather is approaching, the value of disinfecting agents must force itself upon public attention. The term itself has been used in rather a lax way, and indiscriminately employed to describe various operations. The different properties ascribed to it are: (1) That of checking chemical changes (catalysis) due to the action of azotized ferments, independent of the presence of organisms; (2) that of arresting decompositions in which the presence of organisms is necessary; embracing such changes as fermentations in acid media, and putrefactions, occurring in alkaline media; (3) that of destroying the products of the above processes and rendering them innocuous; (4) that of destroying contagia of communicable diseases. Such are the various meanings attached to the word "disinfectant." Dr. Baxter, in his Report on an "Experimental Study of Certain Disinfectants," published in the Public Health Reports of the Medical Officer of the Local Government Board, endeavors to circumscribe the term, and the definition he gives is, we think, a very desirable limitation. It is this—"Any agent capable of so modifying the contagium of a communicable disease during its transit from a sick to a healthy individual, as to deprive it of its specific power of infecting the latter." . . . "A disinfectant is only designed to act upon contagious matter after it has been given off by the generating organism, and before it penetrates into a healthy one." In cases of small-pox, scarlet fever, and other diseases communicable at a distance, the value of such an agent is great. Such a definition as we have quoted will, by narrowing the scope of enquiry, assist in the attainment of a precise knowledge of this invaluable chemical aid to preventive medicine. If medicine is to serve sanitary purposes it must take cognizances of *preventive* measures rather than curative ones, and in this respect chemistry comes greatly to our aid, and disinfectants are a kind of agents which ought to be more largely used than at present.

If disinfection is to take its proper place as a preventive