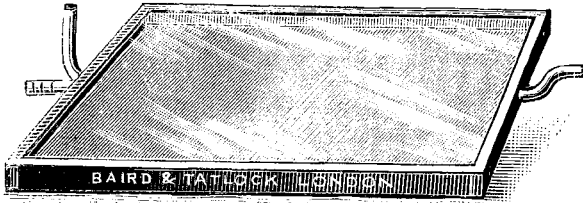


New Inventions.

A NEW PLATE-COOLING APPARATUS.

FOR bacteriologists who are extensively engaged in the bacteriological examination of water and other investigations requiring the frequent use of gelatin Petri plates an important desideratum is to be able to cool the plates quickly so as to allow of rapid solidification. For brushing over the surface of plates containing agar or gelatin it is a great advantage to be able quickly and firmly to solidify the medium, thus enabling the brushing to be performed soon after the media have been poured out.



The following apparatus has been made for me by Messrs. Baird and Tatlock to facilitate the solidification of gelatin and agar media in Petri plates. It consists of a rectangular-shaped copper vessel with a thick plate-glass top, the top being firmly fixed to the copper so that no leakage of water from the interior on to the surface is possible. The apparatus which was made for me measures 18 x 14 inches and is one inch deep and will take from nine to 12 Petri plates according to size. It is provided with three quite short metal tubes as shown in the illustration—an inlet tube at one end, an outlet tube at the other, and a safety tube just above the inlet tube. The inlet tube is connected by indiarubber tubing to a tap and the water flows through the tube, passing out by the outlet tube and from this by means of indiarubber tubing to the sink. In this way a complete circulation of cold water is maintained and media plates put on the surface of the glass are rapidly solidified. The outlet tube is slightly smaller to facilitate the chamber being kept full of water, but risk of breakage of the glass is obviated by the safety tube which also leads by indiarubber tubing to the sink. The tubes are so arranged that the water passing through completely fills the chamber and is in contact everywhere with the under surface of the glass.

The chief points about the apparatus are : (1) the cooling is done entirely by water—no ice is required and everything is at hand ; (2) no water can get on to the surface of the glass and so possible contamination from that source is quite avoided ; (3) a glass surface is superior to a metal one, as it always offers a perfectly level surface ; and (4) the water is in contact all over and so uniform cooling is obtained.

The average time taken to cool gelatin plates to complete solidification from a temperature of 40° C. is from five to six minutes on a warm day with a room-temperature of from 20° to 24° C., and less on cool days. The temperature of the tap-water circulating was very generally about 15° C. Agar plates are of course solidified almost immediately.

Cardiff.

WILLIAM G. SAVAGE, M.D. Lond.

THE BATTLE OF THE CLUBS.

A CORRESPONDENT writes to us pointing out that within the last three months clubs in various districts have united to form medical aid associations, withdrawing in a body from the local practitioners and importing a medical man "who agrees not to practise privately and attends the lot for a fixed sum per annum." He thinks that while some medical men can well afford to do without clubs there are others to whom the loss is of serious consequence, so that he deprecates the policy of medical men in any district allowing a medical aid association to be started for the sake of 6d. or 1s.

extra per member per annum, "because once the clubs leave in a body and form an institution they put the wives and children in as members of that institution and the loss to the local medical men is much greater than it seems at first." He gives figures showing that his own loss has been substantial, but he is apparently unaware that in many cases one of the reasons that have determined medical men to have no further connexion with medical aid associations is the determination of the associations to get the women and children treated at contract prices. The women and children were lost, or about to be lost, as patients to many practitioners when they decided to sever connexion with the clubs. We sympathise genuinely with our correspondent who has suffered for the cause of professional union, but we assure him that it is necessary to resist in many places the attitude taken by medical aid associations towards the medical profession.

THE GOLDEN EAGLE FRIENDLY SOCIETY AND DR. THOMAS COLVIN.

The letter which follows is a clear account of a recent and successful action brought by Dr. Thomas Colvin against the Golden Eagle Friendly Society. We presume that the manager and secretary of the society does not deny having told the patient that his society would be responsible for Dr. Colvin's fees, for apparently at the hearing of the appeal an official note from the society to Dr. Colvin was produced.

"THE FRIENDLY SOCIETY AND THE DOCTOR."

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Under the above heading a report of a case tried before the High Justiciary Court, Edinburgh, appeared in the Scottish newspapers last Tuesday, and as the point at issue is not clearly stated in the report and is of some importance to the profession, I trust that you will allow me to place it before your readers.

The facts of the case are briefly these: The mother of a member of the Golden Eagle Friendly Society, Glasgow, called on Mr. Swanson, the manager and secretary to the society, and informed him that the said member was ill and wished to be attended by the society's medical officer. Mr. Swanson told her that as she lived some distance—fully two miles—from their doctor she was to call me in as I lived in the neighbourhood and the society would be responsible for the expenses incurred. She did so, and having attended the boy for three weeks, giving him medicine and gargles for acute tonsillitis, I sent in my account to the society for the modest sum of 24s. After sending it three times I was informed in an impertinent note written at the foot of my third statement of account that the society was not responsible for it. I at once sued for the amount in the Small Debt Court. When the case came before Sheriff Balfour the defence was that I was not one of the doctors specially appointed by the society and that I was engaged by the patient himself and not by the society. As the woman told her story in court in such a honest and straightforward manner and it was brought out in evidence that she was an utter stranger to me, whereas I was known to Mr. Swanson, having previously done professional work for the society at the usual rates, the sheriff decided in my favour although I could not unfortunately produce in court a note which the woman brought to me with the society's stamp on it and my name and address, the note having been mislaid at the time but was found before the second trial took place. On a strong appeal of the law agent for the society that its medical officer, who holds a professional appointment in one of our local medical schools, was only paid the magnificent sum of 5s. per year per member for sick attendance and free medicine a decree for 12s. was granted. I was willing to accept this rather than lose any more valuable time over so trivial a case, but not so the other side. It appealed to a higher court against the sheriff's decision and involved me in a lawsuit with many pounds of legal expenses at stake. When the appeal came before the Justiciary Court it was dismissed and I was awarded 10 guineas for expenses. The net result is that the Golden Eagle Friendly Society has now to pay something like £30 for legal expenses instead of 12s.

The point which I wish specially to emphasise and which was not clear in the newspaper report of the case is that this decision in no way affects the well-known rule of friendly societies that members must consult the specially appointed medical officers of the society when ill and if they consult any other medical man they do so at their own expense. The decision only brings out clearly that when a member of the society is instructed by a responsible official of said society to consult a medical man other than the appointed medical attendant the society and not the member is liable for the expenses.

I have only to add that this case is an excellent example of the worry and annoyance that we sometimes have in recovering a reasonable and just debt and it is to be hoped that one or two lessons like the above will teach some officials of friendly societies to have a little consideration for the poor underpaid and hard wrought "doctor."

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,
Glasgow, Nov. 3rd, 1902. THOMAS COLVIN, M.D. Glasg.

In the circumstances it would be interesting to know on what grounds Dr. Colvin's modest claim was resisted. The manager and secretary of the society knew that his claim was just and so did the patient. Why did the society try to bounce him out of his fee? As long as these things happen and officials of friendly societies behave in this manner to the medical profession, so long will medical men look askance at sick contract work.