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POISONING FROM COLCHICUM WINE.

On the 24th of November last one of Montreal's street arabs stole from an express waggon a large bottle, which eventually found its way into the house of a man who resided in miserable quarters. It was pronounced to be wine, and on the afternoon of November 25th some seventeen persons were called in. This bottle was again produced, and being placed to the nose of experienced ones was again pronounced wine, when a carousal began. In half an hour the contents of the bottle disappeared, all being drank, except a few ounces which were carried away by one of those who had partaken, for the purpose of treating a friend. Very shortly after, those who had drank it began to grow ill, and no wonder, for the contents of the bottle was Vinum Colehicum, made by Evans, Mercer & Co., and the bottle was on its way to the General Hospital when it was stolen. It was not till the next morning (26th November) that medical assistance was called in to one of the sufferers, and as no history of the drinking was given, a correct diagnosis was not made. It was noon of the same day when information of what had occurred reached the police authorities, who at once furnished them with medical assistance. Dr. Major was taken to the sufferers, who at this time were seventeen in number, and he assumed charge of all the cases, assisted by several other medical men. By evening seven deaths occurred—the remaining ten happily have got over it. Dr. Major has published the cases at great length in the *Canada Medical and Surgical Journal*. As they are exceedingly interesting we give the following Resumé of the symptoms:—

“In from 45 minutes to one hour and a half after taking the wine, vomiting ensued. The contents of the stomach were first rejected, then bile or mucus; afterwards a fluid similar to “rice water” of cholera.

When the amount of poison taken was very great, the purging came on simultaneously with the vomiting,—but if only a small quantity, comparatively speaking, had been swallowed, the evacuation of the bowels was delayed for several hours. The passages were first the natural fœces, then bilious stools, next “rice water,”—a very large amount of a frothy, slimy secretion, compared by one of the patients to clean soap suds. In no case were there any traces of blood to be found. The vomiting continued until the last moment in the fatal cases, and the bowels were emptied involuntarily. Cramps were severe in the stomach, bowels and legs. Severe pains were felt in the knee joints in some. And in two cases very markedly in the left shoulder, so much so, indeed, as to be a continual cause of complaint, and avoidance of lying on the left side. Rubbing was frequently demanded for relief. In the majority there was numbness from the elbow to the wrist; cramps of the fingers, especially the second finger, and in one case extreme numbness of the thumbs under the nails. This latter peculiarity was present even for twenty-six days after. In the case of the boy Thayer, there was great pain between the shoulders. The features (twenty hours after the accident) were pinched and drawn, lips and nose blue, as also the lobes of the ears. The eyes were congested, pupils dilated slightly; voice hoarse and husky, and pain was experienced in speaking.

Feet and lower extremities icy cold, as also were the hands and arms. The rest of the body had a warmish clammy feel, but was below the normal temperature. The pulse was rapid, 125 to 145 or more in the minute, small, compressible, intermitting, and at times imperceptible at the wrist, though it could be found at the elbow with some trouble. The temporal arteries were difficult of detection, even the carotids required patience to distinguish. For several hours before death they were almost pulseless, the heart's impulse was not to be felt over the chest, and even with difficulty heard on applying the ear to the chest wall. The sound might be likened to a blowing sound, or a murmur, or to a heart heard at a very great distance, or through a stone wall, both sounds lapsing into one.

Respiration was full and easy, and was well maintained throughout. The pulse respiration ratio was borne out throughout.

The sufferers were sensible to the last and throughout. One case terminated with a slight convulsive effort. All sat up before dying, falling back in less than an instant. No headache was complained of.