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GANGRENE FOLLOWING THE EXTERNAL USE OF CARBOLIC ACID.

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Having been called upon to amputate two fingers on account of their complete destruction, following the use of carbolic acid as a lotion, I propose to call attention to the subject, more especially as the acid was, in each case, used under the directions of a physician, somewhat loosely given. It will often be noticed, that when any agent, especially some new remedy attains a celebrity and forms the subject of much commendation and discussion in the medical world, that the newspapers copy reports of its wonderful properties, and no matter how potent the agent may be, ere long it is duly installed into the domestic medicamenta. In this way bromide of potassium, chloral hydrate, carbolic acid, and other new remedies have come to be popularly prescribed by every wise old woman and amateur doctor, male or female. The patent medicine men also, who are ever on the lookout for something new, seize on these potent remedies, and stealing some physician's prescription, set to work at once to compound and give to the world, the wonderful cure-all calling it some high sounding name, and be its active principle arsenic, strychnia, phosphorus, or bromine, it matters not, the thing takes for a time and is swallowed wholesale.

Since carbolic acid has attained such a notoriety chiefly under Prof. Lister's antiseptic treatment, it has come to be looked upon as a remedy for all solutions of continuity in skin muscle and bone, and for disinfectant purposes may be found in many houses.

My object however is to give some illustrations

of its destructive powers when incautiously used. About six years ago a gentleman brought his daughter aged nine years, some twenty miles, to consult me about an injury which she had sustained in one of her fingers. Whilst playing with a straw-cutter along with other children, the finger had passed between two cog-wheels, bruising the soft parts and bone down to the first joint. The medical man who was called in to dress the wound, applied to it some strong carbolic acid, and wrapped up the injured part in a rag. On removing the dressing in a day or two the whole finger was completely blackened and withered, in fact dead. Annoyed at such an unlooked for result, the child was brought to me and under the rhigolene spray the finger was removed.

A lady who undertook to decapitate a chicken preparatory to making some fowl soup for an invalid husband, unfortunately missed her aim and very nearly severed the top of her left middle finger. The doctor who was in attendance on her husband, directed carbolic acid lotion to be applied. A quantity of the acid having by the "rule of thumb" been poured into half a teacupful of water formed the wash saturated with which a rag was bound round the injured finger. Next day on removing this dressing the parts which it had enveloped presented a bleached appearance, they were also numb and painless. This was very soon followed by a blackening of the skin and a shrivelling of the whole finger. When I saw the finger five weeks afterwards, the line of demarcation was complete, nature's process of amputation slowly going on near the base of the finger. I accordingly anticipated this process by the knife and forceps, removing the mortified portion. No doubt similar cases have been met with by others in practice. They certainly ought to serve as a lesson to guard against the incautious use of a valuable agent, for apart from the disfigurement, especially in the case of a lady, the pain and annoyance, the loss of even a finger is by no means a slight one.

The caustic and local anæsthetic properties of carbolic acid, may however be turned to practical account in the practice of surgery, such as in operations about the rectum, the skin, opening whitlows, abscesses, and probably for the destruction of nævi and small tumors.