

CANTHARIDES.*

BY R. ROTHER.

The recent paper of Prof. Dragendorff on cantharidal plaster induced the writer to try the proposed process. This is based upon an excellent theory, but in practice abounds with so many obstacles and yields such an unexpectedly inferior result, that the writer believes should other operators be equally unsuccessful, it will never attain to popularity.

A good quality of cantharides in very fine powder was digested with an aqueous solution of potassium hydrate, then treated with a slight excess of chlorhydric acid, dried and converted into cerate according to the pharmacopœia. The resulting product was destitute of vesicating power.

However, the failure to produce blisters with this preparation, the writer is not inclined to charge entirely to Prof. Dragendorff's part of the process. The writer has found that a water-bath heat, as officinally directed, is often inadequate to dissolve the necessary amount of cantharidin for producing an active plaster. But by following the suggestion of Mr. Donovan, to use an increased and prolonged heat, a desirable plaster is most usually obtained.

The chief incumbrances to Prof. Dragendorff's process are :—

Firstly, That the aqueous alkaline solution produces with the powdered cantharides a doughy mass not easily manipulated, and to bring this into a sufficiently fluid condition which the nature of the operation demands, an excessive quantity of alkaline solution, equal to about three times the weight of the cantharides, is necessarily absorbed. The large surplus of alkali again requires a proportionate amount of chlorhydric acid for neutralization.

Secondly, This mass, if a considerable quantity is under treatment, is not so easily dried, as exposure in the open air without artificial heat is entirely inadmissible by reason of the rapid formation of mould. The subsequent powdering of the dried mass is another unpleasant operation which pharmacutists always endeavor to evade, especially as in this case the requirements is a repetition. The unsuccessful issue of the operation excites a doubt whether after all the cantharidin thus liberated is as soluble in the fatty excipient as it would be in its natural state of combination when subjected to an elevated temperature. When the prepared cantharides is not thoroughly dry, or if the fatty matter contains moisture, the cerate invariably and rapidly develops an exuberant growth of mould, but it was found that the presence of moisture in either good or defective cerate neither aided or detracted from the activity; because a good cerate made by the ordinary method

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