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The Antiseptic theory and proper application of Carbolic Acid. By ARCHIBALD E. MALLOCH, M.D., Hamilton, Ont.

Having acted, during six months of the year 1868, as Prof. Lister's House Surgeon in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, I read with much interest a paper which appeared in the *Canada Medical Journal* for January, 1870, entitled "An examination of the merits of Carbolic Acid as a remedial agent in the practice of surgery, with a glance at its history," by Prof. Canniff.

The writer states, "Mr. Lister has placed on record, very fully, the principles upon which he bases his treatment of surgical affections with carbolic acid:" but, from a perusal of this paper, and also one by the same writer, which appeared in the *Canada Medical Journal* for January, 1868, I am led to believe that Prof. Lister's antiseptic system and its application are not fully understood.

At the very outset of his consideration of this system, the following sentences are to be found: "In his (Prof. Lister's) papers he enunciates the doctrine that the air is inhabited by myriads of minute organisms, and that when a wound is made in the external structures of the body, these minute animals swarm into the wound, and by their presence lead to suppuration and decomposition of organizable fluids and even of tissue itself. According to Lister, it is in the case of contused wounds with fracture of bone, that the living germs prove most active; but no wound, not even an incised one, is safe, unless protected from the air from the first, or treated with some agent to destroy the vitality of the organisms. The agent he employs is carbolic acid, which is understood to have the power of destroying the lower forms of life."

As the writer, in the above and other sentences, places suppuration first, and decomposition last, the inference naturally follows, that in Prof. Lister's opinion, the occurrence of decomposition is of secondary importance to suppuration, and that the formation of pus is due, more immediately than decomposition, to the action of these organisms.