

## Therapeutic Notes.

### CLINICAL LECTURE ON SOME MEDICAL USES OF CARBOLIC ACID.

*Delivered at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital.*

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This carbolic acid (or phenic acid, as it was formerly called) is, as you know, one of the products derived from the oil of coal-tar, and has a chemical composition of  $C_6H_5O + HO$ . It is met with either as an oily liquid or in the crystalline form, and has an acrid burning taste, and a strong odour closely resembling that of creasote. It is slightly volatile, and is readily soluble in water, oil, or glycerine. One of its most valuable properties is that of preventing the decomposition of animal tissue—a property which it possesses in common with salicylic, boracic, chromic, and other acids and substances; but it is more generally useful than either of these, because it is not only more certain in its action, but may be employed in a more concentrated form without risk of injuring the parts or tissues to which it is applied.

The efficacy of the acid in checking diseased or septic action appears to depend upon its being brought into absolute contact with the part to be acted on, and it would seem to exert no beneficial effect beyond the exact limit of the part so touched.

The diseases in which I have found the carbolic acid especially usefully are—1. All that class of local festering, pustulating diseases of the skin which are at once so common and so difficult to cure. They include all kinds of pustules, boils, and carbuncles; sycosis, pustular acne, and festering ringworm. 2. Such strumous sores (especially of the neck) as come under the care of the physician. 3. Excoriations of the os and canal of the cervix uteri. 4. Phthisis in its second and third stages, and cases of chronic bronchitis accompanied with more or less purulent expectoration.

I have said that in order to be effective the carbolic acid must be brought into contact with the part to be acted on, and I doubt not that in many cases where it has been found ineffec-

tive the failure has been due to a neglect to ensure this contact. In the pustulating and suppurating diseases of the skin I have mentioned it is never sufficient to apply the solution of the acid, of whatever strength, upon or to the outside of the skin. It must always be introduced into the interior of the sore or pustule itself, and so as to come sufficiently in contact with every part of the diseased surface. Of its efficacy thus applied I have now had a very considerable experience, and so certain am I of its curative powers in these cases that I state with the utmost confidence that all cases of boils and carbuncles in their earlier stages can be absolutely aborted and cured, whilst even in later stages their further increase can be almost surely prevented. For this purpose a very strong glycerine solution should be employed, and it is best conveyed into the interior of the pustule, boil, or suppurating spot, by a new quill pen dipped into the solution, and introduced by a rotatory motion through its apex, where a sufficient aperture will generally be found. In carbuncles, which are necessarily larger, and often have several openings, several such introductions may be necessary, or, at a later period, threads of lint soaked in the fluid, may be passed with a probe well into all the sieve-like openings. Occasionally, as when the mass is large and solid, a watery solution of the acid may be injected with a hypodermic syringe into various parts of the hardened growth. The same plan of treatment is often quite effective in cases of sycosis, pustular acne, and festering ringworm. And it is doubtless so because it destroys germs which, living in the involutions of the skin, are the essential cause of these various diseases. In the case of acne, and of boils and carbuncles, the essential dependence of these diseases upon vegetable germs has scarcely been demonstrated,\* but their mode of

\* Mr. Startin has written that in a few cases of boils and carbuncles he has found cryptogamic vegetation like that seen in sycosis; and I have recently had a case of small carbuncle, in which, amongst the masses of plastic and other cells obtained from its interior, I observed, on pressure, a cloud of small rounded granules suddenly to diffuse themselves in the fluid in the field of the microscope, which were undistinguishable from those of the *Achorion Schonleinii*.