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## Original Communications.

### CARBOLIC ACID, AND ITS USES IN MEDICINE AND SURGERY.

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Read before the Medical Section of the Canadian Institute, April 2nd, 1869.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN :—

The subject I have chosen this evening to bring before your notice, is Carbolic Acid and its uses in Medicine and Surgery. I have no doubt it is already well known to you all, but I trust you will not consider it unworthy of your attention for a few moments, I have nothing original to bring before your notice, it is merely a history of the various modes in which it has been used, pointing out the latest improvements and manner of using it. Time necessarily prevents my entering fully into all the diseases in which carbolic acid is used.

The Germans seem to have been amongst the first who used carbolic acid, or compounds analogous to it, in the treatment of disease, but to Dr. Lemaire, of Paris, are we indebted for the earliest publications on this subject. In 1861, he published three essays on its uses, and in 1863 he published an extensive monograph on its uses in medicine and surgery.

Dr. Declut, in 1865, published at Paris, another volume on carbolic acid.

I think to Prof. Lister, of Glasgow, is justly due the honour of being the first to use it extensively in England, more especially in the treatment of compound fractures, this was in March, 1865, in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, in a case of compound fracture in the leg, in this case however, it did not prove successful, but it did not alter him from persevering most energetically his researches on this subject, and you all know with what great success his labours were crowned.

Dr. Lemaire attributes its sanative effects, to

the power it possesses of arresting decomposition, and the development of fungi.

Mons. Pasteur, has long since proved, how the atmosphere produces decomposition of organic substances, he has demonstrated that it is not to its oxygen or any of its gaseous constituents, but to minute particles suspended in it, which are the germs of various low forms of life, and which become the essential cause of decomposition. Carbolic acid seems to possess the power of destroying these low forms of life existing in the atmosphere, and to this we must attribute its great benefit in the treatment of compound fractures and wounds.

The grave results which follow compound fractures so frequently, is undoubtedly due in a great measure, to the entrance of air, producing decomposition of the blood which is effused around the fragments, and among the interstices of the tissues, converting this effused blood into an acrid irritant, producing both local and constitutional disturbance.

While I was in India, being there connected with a Railway, I had many opportunities of trying carbolic acid, in contused and lacerated wounds in the natives, especially about the feet, as they are always barefooted, and consequently more exposed to such accidents, and I am now, fully convinced of its great usefulness, in the treatment of wounds.\* Carbolic acid as you well know, is extracted from the light oils of tar, by distillation, and then treating the products with a concentrated solution of potash, which distil at a temperature between 320° and 392° F., separating the alkaline solution from the hydro-

\*During the very warm months of May, June and July, in India wounds rapidly became filled with maggots, unless the greatest attention is paid to cleanliness, and the dressings frequently changed. As my practice was very scattered, I could not manage always to visit my Hospital daily, and so was obliged to leave the cases in charge of my native assistant, on my return, through neglect, on his part, I constantly found maggots in the wound, which, of course, prevented the parts from healing. After I began to use carbolic acid, I never in a single instance, found a maggot in a wound, notwithstanding, I used to direct my assistant not to remove the dressings, but simply to apply the acid externally, daily, during my absence. I was very much gratified by these results, as it used to be a frequent cause of annoyance to me. I should fancy, here, during the very warm summer months, the same thing constantly happens; and I am sure if you use the acid you will meet with the same happy results I did.