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On Testing for Strychnine. By G. P. GIRDWOOD, Esq., M.R.C.S.L.,
Asst. Surgeon 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards.

The numerous cases of accidental or intentional poisoning with this deadly agent, the facility with which it is obtained, and the constant practice of using it for the destruction of vermin, by which accidents so frequently occur, and the various legal questions arising from its use, render the detection of strychnine a matter of great importance. The distinctive tests for the presence of strychnine, when pure, are simple and strongly characteristic. If the suspected matter be placed on a piece of white porcelain, moistened with a drop of strong sulphuric acid, and a small crystal of bichromate of potash added and moved about, it leaves in its track a beautiful purple color, by which the presence of strychnine may at once be recognized. This color may be produced in a variety of ways with strychnine; sulphuric acid and peroxide of lead, or manganese will give it. Strychnine moistened with sulphuric acid on a small piece of platina foil and a galvanic current passed through it, as suggested by Dr. Letheby, will also produce the same color. With strong nitric acid, strychnine, if pure, produces no change, but it usually gives a fine red color, which changes quickly to yellow, owing to the presence of a small quantity of brucine.

The sulphuric acid and bichromate of potash, and the sulphuric acid and galvanic current, are the two tests most to be relied upon, and are certain and easy of application. To apply these tests with efficacy, the strychnine must be in an isolated condition: it is seldom that the medical man is called upon to test it in this state. He is usually required to decide if it has been the agent that has destroyed life, and he has to seek it in some organic matter, such as the body of the