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CARBOLIC ACID AND ITS SUBSTITUTES.

For many years carbolic acid has been almost the sole antiseptic used for surgical purposes. Lately, however, there has been accumulating a mass of evidence which has had the effect of throwing doubt, not on its antiseptic properties, which are still recognized as second to none, but on its harmlessness. There are several authentic cases now on record where carbolic acid, used in the form of spray or gauze dressing, has been the direct means of causing death.

There are two distinct forms of carbolic acid poisoning—one, where the symptoms set in with a very extraordinary rapidity; the other, where its injurious effects are later (a few hours) in manifesting themselves. Cases of the very acute form of poisoning have not, as yet, been described as resulting from the practice of Listerism, but have followed the injection of the acid into the rectum and the local application of the pure acid or highly concentrated solutions of it to the skin. The prominent symptoms of this form of poisoning are vertigo, weakness, condition resembling intoxication, then loss of consciousness, small, weak pulse, frequently cyanosis, and contracted pupils. Müller reports the case of a man who applied the pure acid to two-thirds of his shaven scalp. Immediately he complained of pain in the head, and vertigo. In a few minutes he was unconscious and cyanotic, and died shortly afterwards. Müller also reports the case of a woman troubled with diarrhoea who received an injection per rectum of not more than six ounces of a half per cent. solution. Almost immediately she complained of vertigo, noises in the ears, great weakness and faintness. She recovered. A three-year-old child, for the treatment of thread-worms, received an injection of a half per cent. solution; scarcely the half of a medium-sized syringe was injected when the child became pale, limpid and insensible. It was fifty minutes before the child was considered out of danger.

It appears that the rectum, especially its lower part, is more