

DEATHS FROM CHLOROFORM.

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The readers of medical periodicals must often be startled by the number of ominous paragraphs headed "Another death from chloroform," and their confidence in this valuable anæsthetic has been much shaken by the attempts that are being made to give undue prominence to the dangers sometimes following its use. General readers, moreover, are seldom ignorant that both in medical and in non-medical hands death is occasionally the penalty of using chloroform, and of late a succession of catastrophes of this kind among persons who, from happening to belong to the higher classes, have all their movements duly recorded in the papers, must have increased the popular dread of so potent a drug. Thus is it always; no sooner is some discovery made for the good of mankind than enemies arise, who display the perversest ingenuity in raising all the objections they can think of to its legitimate employment, while persons unacquainted with its uses and dangers rashly attempt to turn it to account, and of course do themselves harm instead of good.

Chloroform, ether, opium, and chloral-hydrate, are among the greatest blessings which the progress of chemical science has placed within the reach of man, and, rightly used, save every year thousands of lives, diminish suffering, and make the approach of death more endurable, provided always that the administrator of these drugs thoroughly understands their uses and knows how to reduce their dangers to a minimum. Some deaths will always follow the administration of chloroform; although for every life thus sacrificed, at least a hundred will be prolonged or saved.

What chloroform has done it would be difficult to describe to non-medical readers. Hundreds of thousands of operations have been easily and painlessly performed under its soothing influence. The dread of submitting to a surgical operation has been reduced to a minimum, while the recollection of the agony endured while the operation was going on no longer distresses the patient all the remainder of his life. Many operations can now be attempted that, but for chloroform, would be impossible or unjustifiable. The surgeon can deliberately and skilfully go through all the steps of an operation, as a few minutes more or less are, generally speaking, of secondary importance. To the oculist, chloroform has been invaluable, and has given increased facilities for performing some of the most difficult and delicate of surgical operations. Dislocations are often readily reduced under chloroform, when all the violence in the world might otherwise be insufficient. Hernia can often be successfully treated when, without chloroform, any