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RHEUMATISM
AND RHEUMATIC GOUT

TREATED ON ANTISEPTIC PRINCIPLES

BY

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RHEUMATISM AND RHEUMATIC GOUT TREATED ON ANTISEPTIC PRINCIPLES.

THE remarkable success which has of late years attended intelligent and well-directed attempts to prevent or arrest disease, in whatever stage of its progress we may have found it, offers to us the assurance that, by diligent pursuit of the same principle of action, we shall be encouraged by the achievement of further satisfactory results. That such is no new dream of an enthusiast can be established by the testimony of numberless, both professional and lay, observers, who, having been induced to try this unwonted system of treatment, were soon convinced of its intrinsic importance. And this is equally true both as to sulphurous and

carbolic acids. Professor Lister, who has made the latter agent peculiarly his own, by the persevering ingenuity with which he has adapted it to various diversities of circumstances, has proved incontestably its great value as a protection against accidents familiar to all professional men ; while I, in my own limited sphere, have found in sulphurous acid a worthy rival to it, in every respect its equal in antiseptic efficiency, which had long lain under the unrighteous ban of *dangerous*, but which, on impartial investigation, has been found to be available as a handy and faithful friend. Which of the two is entitled to pre-eminence it is of little moment to inquire ; the late Professor Syme's opinion being that they were of equal value, but that sulphurous acid had the advantage of being applicable either as a liquid or in the convenient and *self-acting* condition of a vapour. In the latter form he had tested its reliability in hospital gangrene, with results that "made the deepest impression on his mind," and in this belief he was corroborated by his faithful nurse, the late Mrs. Lambert, who told me repeatedly that on five different occasions the pestilence was arrested by its employment, and that it was the only ap-

pliance which she had ever seen do any good, in her long experience of upwards of thirty years.

But my conviction is, and based upon extended opportunities for experiment, that there is little to be gained by a vain attempt to define the respective merits of these two antiseptics, which ought to be found only in alliance ; for it appears to me as by no means improbable, that they have each a province allotted to them by nature as in some respects a special one, the precise limitation of which, however, our information does not as yet enable us to discriminate. The practical lesson deducible therefore is, that meanwhile both are best, and that by their intelligent conjunction in actual practice the protection which they can afford may be materially enhanced.

In accordance with this view it occurred to me that, if by any means carbolic acid could be elevated into the same category as sulphurous acid, so as to be not only self-appliant but respirable, an important step would be gained, and I have had the good fortune to be able to solve the difficulty by the contrivance of a substance which during slow combustion emits carbolic acid vapour, which can

be breathed for any length of time, not only without inconvenience but with positive advantage, under a wide range of adverse circumstances. Its inhalation has a singularly soothing and refreshing effect upon patients restless from febrile ailments, and both they and the attendants appreciate its instantaneously deodorizing power, of itself no mean qualification. But its influence over disease in minor forms lends to it an importance before which everything else pales, and shows incontestably that while Providence may have seen fit to scourge us with pestilences of various sorts, He has not left us entirely at their mercy, but has, at the same time, held out to us "a way of escape," if we would only accept it unconditionally, and duly exercise our intellect in its employment.

Sulphurous acid is now, after five years' experience, recognised and familiarly resorted to as a remedy of unquestionable utility, but I think that a perusal of the following cases will show that its real value is as yet but imperfectly understood, and that it promises succour under conditions otherwise almost desperate. It is used as a domestic cure for simple ailments in all parts of the world, and with

marvellous uniformity as to result, but its more definite employment in really pronounced affections is not less interesting, while it is followed by no less tangible benefit.

Rheumatism and Rheumatic Gout have through all times proved less amenable to medical treatment than most other diseases, and, indeed, may be said to have contemned all interference, but, as may be gathered from the sequel, it appears to me as by no means improbable that sulphurous acid may prove equal even to their subjugation. The accepted belief as to their morbid element is, that it is originated in some ill-defined perversion of the digestive function, most probably of a fermentative kind; and as sulphurous acid is an anti-ferment of great power, its aptness, under such circumstances, is peculiarly fitting. But whatever be the true explanation there can be no question as to the authenticity of the facts narrated; and their importance and value are increased by the comfortable reflection that the patients are all alive and willing to give their attestation to them.

ACUTE RHEUMATISM—*Case No. 1.*—A workman had been under a severe attack for three weeks

before I saw him. Scarcely a joint had escaped, and he was quite lame in both wrists and hands. I at once had the joints swathed with lint soaked in sulphurous acid, and covered with gutta-percha; he took internally a tea-spoonful of acid in a wine-glass of cold water every third hour for some days, and his improvement was not long deferred.

Case No. 2.—A boy of 12 was sent home from school in a state of high fever, with severe pain in his hip-joint. He had had rheumatic fever once before, so that I was on the alert, and at once applied a long splint as a precautionary measure, and a fold of lint soaked in acid over the groin, and this likewise covered with gutta-percha. Forty drops of acid were administered internally every second hour; and under this mode of treatment it was found that within twenty-four hours every unfavourable symptom had disappeared.

Case No. 3.—Another boy similarly circumstanced had along with rheumatic joints an attack of pleurisy. A few leeches were applied to his chest, the acid was given him in small doses, frequently repeated, and in a few days he was well.

Case No. 4.—A delicate boy of 10 was taken with acute rheumatism, and so intense were his sufferings that I was glad to have recourse to opiates at the outset; but in spite of them, of alkalies, colchicum, calomel and opium, and quinine, each in their turn, the disease kept its hold, while within a fortnight there occurred three accessions of pleurisy. In these circumstances, and believing that it would not be warrantable any longer to rely on what I had found to be unavailing remedies, I at once abandoned them and put him on the sulphurous acid. The change for the better was rapid, and not less remarkable otherwise, for he soon became placid, and enjoyed soft sleep, the physical symptoms gradually ameliorated, and his recovery, although slow, was thenceforward steady and complete. He got forty minims every hour for a time, and one interesting fact in connexion with his case is worthy of note. In my presence he said, soon after he had begun the use of the acid, “Mamma, it is surely the time for you to give me my drops.” I remarked that it was unusual for a child to ask for its medicine, when he replied that “it always took away the pain.”

Case No. 5 was that of a middle-aged farmer, of stout frame and proportions, although of very active habits. A few weeks ago I had occasion to see him on account of rheumatism, from which disease he had suffered severely on three previous occasions,—the last eighteen months ago, by which he was laid aside for several months. He was in great distress both of body and mind ; he had been taking a few doses of colchicum, fifteen minims thrice a day, at the recommendation of a medical friend, and with this I did not interfere, but I resolved to push the sulphurous acid with vigour, and accordingly ordered him a dessert-spoonful containing ten grains of bicarbonate of potash every second hour. The trifling addition of alkali did not appear to affect the therapeutic influence of the remedy, and it has the advantage of rendering the medicine more palatable ; my chief purpose being to disguise it so that it should not be recognised. In this I most thoroughly succeeded, for my patient, who had some former experience to guide him, asked if he might be allowed to drink some “ sulphurous acid ” in cold water, as he was very partial to it. Of course I assented, and during the few days of his

illness he partook of it freely. Within twenty-four hours from the time the treatment was begun there was a remission in his symptoms, while by the end of the sixth day he was sitting by the fire and entirely free from pain.

It must be borne in mind, however, that this man had the benefit of whatever advantage can be derived from the persistent inhalation of carbolic acid vapour, which assuredly contributed to his comfort, and, to use his own term, "made him feel fresh."

I have numberless cases of chronic rheumatism, rheumatic gout, sciatica, and neuralgia, some of them reported on to me by medical friends and others, and some which have passed under my own observation, wherein the good effects of this mode of treatment are no less conspicuous. The topical application of the acid, either in its pure state or diluted with three parts of water, is a favourite and efficient resource in chronic stiffness of the smaller joints. It cannot be misapplied or overdone, for the worst that will happen will be excoriation of the skin, which, however, is more than compensated for by the relief conferred.

Case No. 6.—On the last occasion on which I enjoyed the privilege of having my late friend, Sir J. Y. Simpson, at Kirkcaldy, we were passing along the street, when a message was given to me in regard to a lady with whom Sir James had some previous acquaintance, and as we had to pass her door he proposed to visit her along with me. She was an old patient of his, and for twenty years had been a martyr to rheumatic gout, which she had acquired in India, and had hitherto failed to shake off. She was then suffering from one of her familiar accessions, and Sir James asked what I proposed to do. I prescribed one teaspoonful of sulphurous acid every fourth or sixth hour. Of this he approved, and it was at once put in practice, with the usual result of relief not being long deferred, and recovery being very satisfactory. She shortly afterwards left this neighbourhood, but I had a message from her, after twelve months' interval, to say that she had had no return of her enemy, but that she was still continuing the use of the acid, of which she took three teaspoonfuls daily.

Case No. 7.—A married lady, who has been for many years unusually liable to sciatica, had lately

a threatening which left no doubt on her mind that she was about to be bedridden for weeks to come, and she made her arrangements accordingly. Her husband, however, had himself derived great benefit from the topical application of the acid in facial neuralgia, and he suggested a trial to his wife, who immediately carried it out. A small towel was soaked in acid and laid over the hip, this was covered with gutta-percha and fixed by a binder. Thus circumstanced she went to sleep, and awoke in the morning perfectly free from uneasiness.

Case No. 8.—A middle-aged man, a tailor, came to me some months ago suffering intensely from neuralgia in the eyebrow, which he said had undergone scarcely any intermission for ten weeks. I prescribed for him Sir Charles Bell's croton-oil pill and the immediate application of the acid. He returned to me by arrangement in eight hours, and reported himself much relieved, and under the continued treatment the disease had entirely disappeared within three days. The skin of his brow was severely excoriated, and he said that the application of the acid *now* gave him great pain, which, however, although intense, was of a different charac-

ter from the tie, and not nearly so intolerable. He felt some abatement of the original pain within an hour of the acid's having been applied, and three hours before his pills took sensible effect.

These cases could be multiplied, but enough surely has been put forward to induce others to test the validity of my inductions, and as the system recommended is entirely devoid of danger, I think its claim to public confidence stands on a broad and firm basis, and gives reasonable promise of extended usefulness.