

Sexton (S)

THE USE OF CALCIUM SULPHIDE IN THE TREAT-  
MENT OF INFLAMMATIONS OF THE EXTERNAL  
AUDITORY MEATUS. ✓

By SAMUEL SEXTON, M.D.,

NEW YORK.



THE persistency and painfulness of certain well-known inflammatory processes of the external auditory meatus, and the futility of the remedies which have hitherto been available in their routine medication—surgical means excepted—have spurred the writer to numerous experiments with the hope of ascertaining the action of any that would relieve the distressing symptoms. None, however, were attended with the success hoped for, and patients were left to time-honored measures until an experiment with the sulphides was decided upon. This selection was made chiefly because they were reputed to control the suppurative processes, under certain circumstances, in other parts of the body. The sulphide of calcium was selected for trial, and the conditions of the ear in which it was used were the following, namely, furuncles and diffuse inflammation. Its use was extended to certain cases where the inflammatory action tended toward suppuration: in erythema, eczema, pemphigus, herpes, erysipelas, etc.

Furunculous inflammation, which is described by Schwartze as a perifollicular inflammation in the skin, is especially liable to affect the outer extremity of the external auditory meatus, and frequently, owing to the richness of the locality in connective tissue, the inflammation extends deeply and becomes phlegmonous in character. Diffuse inflammation in the skin of the meatus, although liable to result in abscesses, etc., at the outer third of the canal, is most frequently found in the deeper portions, where, owing to the absence of connective tissue, its behavior is different, and there is likely to be periostitis as well as an extension of the inflammation

to the drum-head. These affections are characterized, as is well known, by their tedious nature, their remote causes being usually of long continuance. One crop of furuncles after another appears indefinitely, unless arrested by treatment; and the diffuse inflammation, it may be stated, acts in a similar manner. The irregular recurrence of these affections, where the causes remain, is to be looked for, in some patients, for years, the attacks being mostly in warm weather, but not always.

It is not my purpose here to enter into details as regards the etiology, pathology, and general symptoms of these affections, as it would lead me far away from the purpose of the present paper.

As regards the usual treatment of these affections by incisions, together with the application of leeches, it may be said that although these are frequently indicated, there are a large number of cases where the conditions—idiosyncrasy, etc.—seem to contraindicate their use, the patients being made much worse by the procedure. It is in such cases, which every aurist frequently meets with, that the remedy here proposed seems to act with especial advantage. There are also cases where the suppurative action is uncommonly slow, in which the remedy seems to act favorably.

That sulphur and its compounds have long possessed great repute as curative agents, both in the profession and among the laity, is a fact well known. Its uses have extended to an important list of affections, and there can be no doubt but that it is justly entitled to the high estimate that has so long been placed upon its merits.

The sulphureous waters of the earth, appearing in springs upon its surface, have for a long period of time been sought for on account of their reputed healing virtues.

Sidney Ringer<sup>1</sup> says of the sulphides: "The sulphides appear to me to possess the property of preventing and arresting suppuration. Thus, in the inflammation threatening to end in suppuration, they reduce the inflammation and avert the formation of pus. The influence of this group on the suppurative process is still more

---

<sup>1</sup> A Hand-book of Therapeutics, Fifth Edition, Wm. Wood & Co., New York, 1876.

conspicuous after the formation of pus. They then hasten maturation considerably, whilst at the same time they diminish and circumscribe the inflammation, promote the passage of the pus to the surface and the evacuation of the abscess." Ringer, in speaking of these remedies as producing different and apparently opposite effects, as the dispersion of inflammation in one case and the expulsion of pus in another, likens them to poultices and hot fomentations, which both subdue inflammation and prevent suppuration, and in other cases considerably hasten the process. The therapeutic action of this remedy is not well understood, but a careful reading of Ringer's work will throw some light on the subject. My own experience in the use of this remedy for aural affections began more than two years ago, and it extends over a very considerable field of private and dispensary practice. I feel justified from the experience thus had, in this special department, in confirming what has been here quoted from the writings of Ringer, the results obtained having been in many instances quite a surprise to me.

I have been in the habit of administering the calcium sulphide in nearly all cases where inflammation of the meatus externus was a symptom, in some stage or other of the disease, but especially in those where suppuration has occurred or threatens to occur. Should there be caries of the bone, periostitis or extensive destruction of the tissue in connection with these affections, the remedy may also be employed. In scrofulous affections this medicine is much praised, and in certain cases it is said to improve the general health.

Furuncles in the meatus, under the use of this medicine, are frequently observed to abort and dry up without a discharge of pus. In some instances I rely entirely on this medicine in the treatment of inflammation in the ear; but free incisions are in some instances, of course, not to be omitted, as when the pain is urgent from distention, or a collection of pus exists which is too large to be absorbed. Leeches should be resorted to when arterial tension is great and the parts are highly engorged with blood; but in cases where they seem to provoke irritation, they should be repeated with much caution. The prevention of a continuance or a return of furuncles, etc., by this remedy, is very clearly possible, provided no remote cause be left active.

The preparation of calcium sulphide that I have lately used is the first decimal trituration,<sup>1</sup> of which I direct about a grain to be taken every two or three hours in urgent cases; in subacute cases with less frequency. In children the dose should be less, a grain of the trituration being diffused in water; the amount to be given can be easily graduated.

The medicine is usually given dry upon the tongue, and the only unpleasant symptoms complained of by the patient are the bad taste, and in rare instances slight nausea.

The decided effect of this medicine may often be observed in the drying up of the sores in the meatus in twenty-four hours; but I am in the habit of continuing it for some days, then discontinuing it unless the symptoms seem to again indicate its use.

This preparation can be obtained from Caswell, Hazard & Co. New York, under the name of Hepar Sulph. Calc. 1<sup>x</sup> Trit.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Piffard, "On the Use of certain Triturations," Medical Record, Dec., 1877.

