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Realgar-Arsenic Di-Sulphide

IN THE

TREATMENT OF SKIN DISEASES.

BY

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REALGAR-ARSENIC DI-SULPHIDE.

Some Notes on the Use of Realgar-Arsenic Di-Sulphide
(As² S²), in the Treatment of Skin Diseases.*

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Last Spring I had the honor to present to this Society a preliminary report of the results which I had obtained from the use of realgar, the di-sulphide of arsenic. Since then I have employed this preparation of arsenic in a large number of cases. I present these notes to-night to inform you that the favorable report which I submitted of its action, has been fully confirmed by subsequent use, both in my private and hospital cases, as well as in the hands of other members of this Society.

It may be advisable for me to mention, in a cursory manner, some of its chemical properties.

The compounds of arsenic and sulphur† are—

Arsenic di-sulphide (or realgar), As² S².

Arsenic tri-sulphide (or orpiment), As² S³.

Arsenic penta-sulphide, As² S⁵.

Arsenic Di-Sulphide, (realgar), As² S².—This body occurs

* Read before the Medical Society of the District of Columbia.

† Wurtz's Chemistry.—Greene.



in nature in the form of transparent, red crystals, which belong to the type of the oblique rhombic prism. It is obtained as a red mass, having a conchoidal fracture by melting seventy-five parts of arsenic with thirty-two parts of sulphur. It is fusible, and may be crystallized by slow cooling. When strongly heated in closed vessels, it boils and distils without alteration; but when heated in the air, it burns into arsenious and sulphurous oxides.

Since it is the general impression that the crude preparations are frequently insoluble and inert, and with a view of showing what some of the most eminent and distinguished authorities have concluded after a careful investigation, I am prompted to quote the following paragraph:*

"It is now established beyond reasonable doubt, that in some parts of Lower Austria, as Styria, many of the inhabitants are accustomed to take considerable quantities of arsenic, sometimes as a condiment, with food. It is said they often eat it with cheese. They usually begin with a small dose, once or twice a week, the quantity being gradually increased until half a grain, or a grain, or even more, is taken at one time. This habit seems to induce no untoward symptoms. Arsenic is eaten for a two-fold purpose. The women, and even the men, take it to clear the complexion and to improve the personal appearance; and it is said to effect these objects. The men more frequently take it to enable them to undergo great exertion without fatigue, and they maintain that it enables them to climb mountains and accomplish fatiguing tasks, impossible to accomplish without it. The experience of most countries is opposed to the Styrian practice, for it is generally found that the long sustained administration of arsenic fails to induce tolerance of the drug; but, on the contrary, entails serious consequences. Even in the arsenic eating countries, the habit is not without risk, for there it is the general opinion that many fall victims to the drug. It has been supposed, that taken in an insoluble form, the arsenic is not absorbed at all, but passes out with the motions, leaving the system unaffected by it; but Dr. Maclagan's investigations effectually disposed of this supposition, for after witnessing a well known arsenic eater eat arsenic, and afterwards collecting his urine, a considerable quantity of poison was obtained from it."

* Ringer's Hand-Book of Therapeutics, 11th Ed. page, 225.

I have employed this drug in the treatment of a variety of diseases, and will state them in order to more fully show its action.

Dr. X, a physician, has been a sufferer with psoriasis for six years; at no time during this period has he been free from the eruption, which was general in its distribution. He had been trying, as you will readily suppose, nearly everything in the Pharmacopœia for relief. He was unable to take any of the arsenical preparations ordinarily prescribed, on account of an idiosyncrasy. He was opposed to using the local remedies which I prescribed, as they interfered with his professional work. He began by taking one granule 1-100 gr. of realgar three times a day, and gradually increased the dose to eight granules three times a day. There was a general improvement in his physical condition; and after a few months use of this remedy, the eruption entirely subsided. He neglected to continue the remedy as he had been advised, and there was a return of the disease, which again subsided after a further use of the drug. This remedy produced no disagreeable effect like the other preparations of arsenic, and was the only one he was able to tolerate.

This physician has furnished me with a statement of the results he has obtained in eight cases in his private practice, and the results have been satisfactory. I have prescribed realgar in many cases of acne, furuncles, and where there has been any suppuration—in fact, for such purposes as I prescribe sulphide of calcium—and have obtained as good results. I have used the remedy in chronic eczema, and obtained the same effect that I should have expected from the other forms of arsenic.

In scrofulosis, syphilis, and cases of marked debility, I have prescribed realgar for its tonic alterative properties, and have been gratified with the results. I begin by prescribing one granule of 1-100 gr. three times a day; and every third day increase the dose one granule, until I observe some definite effect being produced.

I have used this remedy in more than a hundred cases, and I present these notes of my further observation of its action.

CONCLUSIONS.

The combination of arsenic and sulphur is frequently preferable, and more serviceable than either of the remedies when used singly. The pleasant form in which it is administered, makes it agreeable for children as well as adults. It is tasteless. It can be more safely administered, since there is no danger from an over-dose, as frequently appears from carelessness in dropping the quantity prescribed in using the solutions.

The dose may be readily and definitely increased or diminished. It does not produce the amount of irritation of the stomach, so frequently attending the use of the other forms of arsenic. The patient is not aware that arsenic is being administered, and it is of uniform strength when properly prepared by competent manufacturing chemists.

In presenting these notes to-night, I simply desire to inform you that I have found that realgar possesses certain medicinal properties, and there may be occasions when the other preparations of arsenic do not seem to meet the indications, when the triturations of realgar may be considered worthy of a trial.

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