

CANTHARIS IN BURNS*

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A few days ago my hand was burned in live steam. The pain was so horribly intense, the relief obtained so miraculously speedy, I feel urged to write about it while the experience is still fresh in mind—at 'white heat' as it were.

Because of its well-known effect upon normal skin, causing redness and burning, followed by vesicles and blisters, Cantharis has long been used in the treatment of burns. Indeed, in *Hering's Guiding Symptoms* the following note appears under Cantharides (Vol. III, page 294).

Recommended by Dr. Hering as a most valuable remedy in scalds and burns. The injured part is immersed or bathed in a few drops of the tincture in water. A potency may be given inwardly. To demonstrate the truth of *similia*, he frequently challenged skeptics to burn their fingers and then immerse the injured member in a dilution of Cantharides.

In *Hering's Domestic Physician* he advised five to eight drops of the tincture to half a tumbler of water. Dip rags (linen are best) in the solution and apply to seat of the injury, renewing them two or three times a day or whenever the pain begins to get worse again.

Dr. Albert E. Hinsdale performed an experiment with tincture of Cantharides using a healthy rabbit. His report follows:

The experiment was made on non-injured and non-shaved rabbit's ears. The animal was stretched out on a level surface with the head elevated so that glasses containing solutions could be placed under the ears. Deep anaesthesia was produced with paraldehyde, following which both ears were submerged for a short period in hot, sterile tap water. Then the water was removed and one ear was submerged in a one per cent solution of non-alcoholic homoeopathic tincture of cantharides, made up in sterilized tap water. (Ten c. c. of the homoeopathic tincture of cantharides were evaporated, at a very gentle heat, to 3.5 c. c. and 1 c. c. of this added to 100 c. c. of sterilized tap water). The other ear was submerged in a 0.75 per cent solution of sodium chloride. The ears were immersed in these solutions for two hours.

The temperature of the water used to produce the burns was 62 degrees C. (145 degrees F.) and the time of the submerging was of two minutes duration.

The rabbit's ears were submerged in the hot water at 9-30 a.m. January 13. After this the left ear was placed for a period of two hours in the solution of cantharides and the right ear in the sodium chloride solution.

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Immediately following the two-hour period, the cantharides ear showed a slight reddening, as did the other ear, but the latter was two or three shades darker. At 4 p.m., the same day, the sodium chloride or right ear showed some desquamation on the inner side. The other ear showed none. Practically no other differences were noticeable in the ears treated. They appeared about normal. There was little evidence that the heat had produced any changes.

On January 14, at 7-30 a.m., the right ear showed, on its inner edge, a large blister, about 1.5 inches long and 0.5 inches wide. Two smaller blisters were also noted. The left ear appeared normal and showed no blisters. The right ear also felt very hot as compared to the left ear. The left ear also stood in a more erect position.

On January 15, at 8 a.m., the ear treated with cantharides appeared normal, while the sodium chloride ear was the same as on the day previous, with the exception that the blisters had broken.

Two other experiments performed in exactly the same manner gave results practically identical with those of the first. One of the rabbits was kept alive for several weeks and, one month after the experiment was performed, the ear treated with cantharides was normal in almost every particular. Only the slightest evidences of the injury were to be detected. The ear treated with the salt solution had sloughed to the extent of two-thirds of its length, leaving a stump which had healed over.

It thus appears that cantharides, when locally applied in dilute solution, immediately after exposure to a moderate degree of heat, is capable of preventing, to a very great extent, the pathological results of burns of at least the first degree. This effect is undoubtedly homoeopathic in character and verifies in a scientific way former statements made with reference to the treatment of burns with cantharides. The clinician can with confidence treat burned surfaces with this drug, knowing for a certainty that the remedy will be effective, that the healing process will take place more quickly with its use than without it, and that the results are not due to psychical suggestion or to an unaided, natural process of recovery.

Laboratory experimentation, however interesting and spectacular, must stand the test of clinical verification or it is without value. Several clinicians have used this treatment with excellent results since these experiments were performed and have assured the writer that the findings possess real therapeutic value. I do not mean to infer that there are no other remedies for burns but I have tried to bring out the point that cantharides is an excellent treatment and that its use in this connection is another illustration of the value of homoeopathic medication.

For a number of years I have been using Cantharides in the treatment of burns, and the patients have reported immediate relief. Instead of using a watery solution, acting upon a hint from Dr. Frank M. Wright, New Rochelle, N. Y., I have stirred up the tincture of Cantharides in a mixture

of equal parts of whole egg and vegetable oil. This gives a dressing which is practically sterile, is easily obtained in emergency, does not evaporate quickly, adheres closely to the injured skin.

I have used it with success in cases of severe sunburn.

As soon as the scald occurred on my own hand my assistant dressed it with vaseline in which a few drops of Cantharis had been mixed. This did not mitigate the pain in the slightest. The suffering was severe indeed. I thought I would faint.

Sending for the materials as speedily as possible, the mixture was concocted in this manner: A tumbler and a fork were sterilized in hot water. An egg was cracked and the whole contents emptied into the glass. The two parts of the empty egg shell were each filled with oil and added to the egg, the mass beaten up with the fork. Then six or seven drops of the tincture of Cantharides were added and when beaten thoroughly, generously spread upon gauze and quickly applied. The relief was instantaneous.

Patients have told me many times of the immediate help they obtained from this peculiar "mayonnaise" but I had never before experienced it myself.

The glass and fork are sterilized, olive oil or any salad oil is practically sterile, the egg is sterile as is the inside of the shell which is used for measuring the oil.

The dressing does not evaporate and keeps the skin soft and pliable. Only one dressing was necessary in this case. The fingers blistered in some places, but from the time of application of this mixture there was no more real pain.

From this personal experience, I recommend the treatment. The effect was astounding.

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