

LITTLE LESSONS IN HOUSEHOLD SURGERY.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



WHERE are a hundred and fifty little accidents liable to occur in a household, which a modicum of applied surgical skill would suffice to set right, thus obviating the necessity for calling in a surgeon or medical man.

It is about a few of the more common of these that I wish to give some useful hints.

Whether you have a medicine-chest in the house or not, there are several handy articles which should always be kept ready in a clean drawer in case of emergency. A little case containing a pair of ordinary surgical lancets of the old-fashioned bleeding pattern, surgical scissors, pins, needles, and thread—these are all the instruments required. Appliances will include one or two bandages, some lint and oiled silk, a bit of caustic silver in a case, and some strips of adhesive plaster. Then there should be a stimulant lotion, an eye lotion, a liniment for sprains, stiffness in joints, &c., and one or two kinds of ointment.

Poultices are handy to allay inflammations and to soothe pain. They are invaluable in swellings about the throat, in whitlows, abscesses, &c. A small bottle of turpentine, and one of carron oil, should also find a place in the family surgical drawer.

The lancets will be sometimes required to open small abscesses or gum-boils. Large swellings containing matter had better be seen to by the family physician. Many people have the greatest horror of the lancet, and will suffer excruciating pain for days from a trifling abscess rather than submit to have it opened. And yet in a case of this kind the relief that follows a simple and almost painless incision is instantaneous. Others, again, are willing to have an abscess opened when it "comes to a head." But it hardly wants opening then, as it will break of its own accord. The time to open an abscess is when there is a fluctuating baggy feel to the touch, giving indication of the presence of *pus*—in other words, of the formation of matter. If this matter cannot have vent it will eat through the tissues that lie immediately above it, and while doing so cause much pain and inconvenience.

When a gum-boil needs to be opened, the lancet should be rolled round with a piece of rag to within about half an inch of the point. It may then be freely used at that part of the boil which is softest. After a gum-boil has been opened, gentle pressure

is needed to squeeze out the matter, and the mouth should be well rinsed with hot water.

I counsel the keeping of pins and needles and thread in the surgical drawer, in order that they may be always ready at hand. The pins should be of different sizes—they are handy for fastening bandages, &c. The thread should be strong and white, and the needles of a fair size—needles with good honest eyes in their heads, needles that even a man can thread.

As to bandages, they can either be bought or made. For economy's sake I think they should be made, and for this purpose old linen of any kind can be washed and utilised. Tear it into strips, and sew it neatly together. The bandages may be of two or even three different breadths—one about an inch and a half for finger purposes, another about two inches, and a third about three. These are called roller bandages. There are also various forms of tailed bandages for application to the scalp, for instance, and to parts of the body to which a roller bandage is not suited. The shapes of these will suggest themselves to a person of sense. The scalp bandage I may mention, however, is a broad one with four tails; this being laid upon the head and brow, the two foremost tails are carried backwards behind the head, crossed on the back of the neck, brought round and tied under the chin, while the two hindermost tails are brought forward and tied under the chin. In bandaging a leg the art lies in keeping the bandage flat, smooth, and moderately tight. Lay the end along the instep first, towards the toes, and bandage from the toes including all the foot except the heel, then swathe the ankle, and so upwards as far as the knee or above it. In ascending the calf of the leg, at every turn the bandage should be plaited half back over itself. This is not absolutely necessary, for, having bandaged the lower half of the leg, you may carry the roller right away up to under the knee and take a turn there, and so on down again to whatever position the bandage is found to lie best and flattest in.

Charpie is made by stretching or holding strips of old linen very tightly, and scraping it with a rough knife. Charpie is a useful application to wounds and may take the place of lint, but after all it is not so handy, it does not lie so flat, and you cannot spread ointment very well on it.

In cases of sores that we wish to take on a kindly healing action, or those that need stimulating, or soothing, water-dressing is invaluable. It is very simple and easy of application. You have only to dip a piece of lint in clean cold water, to which probably a few drops of pure carbolic acid have been added, then apply it to the sore, which it must more than cover. A piece of oiled silk is then applied over the lint to retain its moisture, and the whole is kept in position by means of a retaining bandage.

Water-dressing is also applied to wounds after they

have been properly strapped, and it may sometimes take the place of a poultice for swellings which we want to soothe and reduce.

The morsel of lunar caustic in a case can be bought at a chemist's shop for, I believe, threepence. It is used to cauterise dog or cat or skunk-bites, and also scratches that may be supposed poisonous. I have mentioned skunks merely because I know that CASSELL'S FAMILY MAGAZINE finds its way into every country where the English language is spoken.

It is a well-known fact that hydrophobia is much more likely to be caused by a skunk than a dog-bite, and I for one would never go into the woods, where there was a possibility of being bitten by one of these creatures, without carrying a morsel of caustic in my pocket in case of an accident.

It is a very foolish plan, not to say cruel, to have the dog that has bitten you destroyed. When this is done, it is obviously impossible to discover whether or not he was rabid at the time he made use of his teeth. Let him live by all means; it will be a satisfaction to know that he is running about in the best of health. I cannot help saying that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred when a dog bites any one, the party bitten has been to blame and not the dog; it is not only unjust, therefore, to punish him, but positively mean and cruel. Cats' bites are usually more dangerous than dogs'—that is, they are more apt to fester and take longer to heal, the reason being simply this—a cat's tooth makes a punctured wound, a dog's a more open one.

Adhesive plaster comes in handy. It ought to be the best procurable, and instead of keeping it in a roll in the drawer, it ought to be cut up into strips of different breadths. It is thus ready for immediate use, and there is no chance of its sticking together as it does if kept in bulk.

When it is necessary to use this plaster to keep the edges of a wound together, we must be careful, first and foremost, to see that the wound is perfectly clean, and no sand, glass, or grit in it, which would cause festering and prevent it from healing.

Never cover a wound wholly up with a piece of plaster; whatever be its size, use long narrow strips. Warm the plaster by holding the back of it against a can of boiling water for a few seconds, then apply it across the wound, leaving a small space between each strip to give exit to the lymph. Remember that sticking-plaster has no healing action in itself, the benefits derived from its use are of a purely mechanical nature. Clean cuts are better bound up with the blood, simply with a linen rag, for sticking-plaster is no use until the bleeding stops. In cases of scalp wounds the hair must be shaved off before the plaster is applied.

A grain or two of nitrate of silver to an ounce of distilled water makes a very good stimulating lotion, for wounds or sores that need such an application, but if they are healing kindly, with even white edges and not much exudation, they do not want stimulating.

Languid, indolent sores, and flabby ulcers, want a stimulating lotion applied with lint, after the manner of water-dressing, and the support of a bandage. But

I should like my readers to bear in mind that the healing of ulcers depends in a very great measure upon the state of the constitution. The blood must be strengthened by good food, else the sore will not heal. Why, it cannot heal, unless you supply it with flesh-forming material, and this material must come from the blood. But, in addition to the enrichment of the blood, if the ulcer be in the leg, this must be kept up as much as possible, and bandaged firmly but not too tightly from the toes upwards.

Four or five grains of powdered alum or sulphate of zinc to the ounce of water make another handy stimulating lotion. Goulard water is easily made: simply add a tea-spoonful of sugar of lead to a pint of water; it is rendered more cooling by the addition of spirits of wine. It is an excellent application for painful swellings.

For wry or stiff neck, or in cases where you wish to redden the surface in order to relieve internal swelling and pain, a mixture of one part of hartshorn to two of olive oil is a capital liniment. Rub well in.

Carron oil is a mixture of lime-water and olive oil, and has been in repute for centuries as an application to burns. I know of nothing better, however, for instantaneously taking the heat out of a burn where the surface is not broken than turpentine. Soak the part well with it for a minute or two; the relief is magical. I expect more than a thousand of my readers to be grateful to me for giving them this simple hint.

In conclusion, I have a word or two to say about poultices. In cases of local inflammation of any kind they form the best applications possible. They are of many different kinds. The simplest are made of oatmeal, linseed-meal, or bread and water. The oatmeal poultice is, to speak plainly, just porridge without salt. The linseed poultice is made by stirring the meal into boiling water gradually, and working it up well until a proper consistency is obtained. The bread and water poultice is made by pouring boiling water over pieces of stale bread, covering up with a plate for a short time, then draining off the water. Charcoal may be added to this if thought desirable, which it might be in cases of degenerate ulcers.

Carrots and turnips are sometimes made into poultices, and are very soothing.

Onion poultice is made by mashing up half-roasted onions and spreading them on a rag. It is a favourite application with some for colds in the chest. If the chest be previously reddened by rubbing in a little warm turpentine the effect will be better, but on no account should it be applied to an abraded surface.

The use of the mustard cataplasm is very well known. In pains in the chest from colds it is of great service, and also in cases of dyspepsia and pains in the stomach, with retching and vomiting.

Poultices to the neck, for sore throat and glandular swellings of a painful kind, do good; but if you begin with them, you must keep on changing them, or more harm than good will result. Finally, remember what Dr. Abernethy said about poultices—"They are either blessings or curses, according to whether they be well or badly made."