

# THE PHOTOGRAPHIC NEWS.

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### THE USE OF POISONS BY PHOTOGRAPHERS.

We recently made an incidental allusion to the oddness of the fact that chemists generally, and especially those accustomed to dispense chiefly the substances used in pharmacy rather than those used in arts and manufactures, have a great indisposition to sell, without the instructions of a medical man, various active poisons commonly employed as medicines—such, for instance, as the preparations of morphia—whilst no difficulty whatever exists in obtaining in large quantities some of the most dangerous mineral poisons for trade purposes. The absence of difficulty in obtaining such articles, and the familiarity with their daily use, often breed oblivion as to danger, especially in relation to substances the deadly nature of which is not enforced on the attention by reiterated words of caution. An esteemed medical correspondent, to whose suggestions our readers have often been indebted, sends us a communication to call especial attention to the indifference and carelessness with which many dangerous substances are constantly handled by photographers. He says:—

"Exmouth September 9th, 1867.

"Sir,—I have had occasion more than once, through your courtesy, to speak in the columns of the News of the injurious properties of cyanide of potassium; but I do not remember to have seen any caution offered as to the scarcely less serious effects of various other articles in frequent use among photographers in any of the journals devoted to the art; such for instance, as the mineral acids, which inflict often deep and troublesome sores difficult to heal; bichloride of mercury (well known as corrosive sublimate), which is an extremely active poison, producing salivation and other recognized results of mercurial action; and, last, but by no means least, terchloride of gold, for the most part in daily use. Now this salt is, or was at one time, prescribed in France for cutaneous complaints, enlargement of the glands, &c.; and so active is its operation that the surgeon rarely ventures on a dose larger than one-tenth or one-eighth of a grain; and yet in our toning baths this is handled as carelessly as if it were a mere watery and harmless solution. That it has a persistent action on the skin is evident from the obstinate stain it produces, irremovable except by time. What further action—I mean constitutional—it has, I have no personal experience to suggest; but I apprehend it must be analogous to that of bichloride of mercury.

"Prints, when toning, should be handled as little as possible. Bone or ebonite forceps should be used, alike to the benefit of the proofs and the operator's hands. It is something fearful to me to witness the reckless manner in which these acrid poisons are treated in almost every photographic studio; and I am satisfied that much of the sickness that prevails among the photographic fraternity may be traced, not only to ill-ventilated studios and the

fumes of collodion, &c., but to hands constantly impregnated with nitrate of silver solutions (the said nitrate being anything but an inert compound), cyanide of potassium, bichloride of mercury, intensifying mixtures, gold toning baths, &c.; and I think you will be doing the photographic public a service if you will allow me to raise a warning voice in your pages against their abuse, arising either from ignorance or inadvertence.—Your obedient servant,  
M. D."

It is not our object, as it is not the object of our correspondent in publishing this warning, to cause needless alarm, or induce any degree of timidity in the proper use of all the materials which belong to the photographer's business; our sole aim is to arouse caution, and check carelessness. Familiarity breeds contempt and indifference, even where the danger is known; and it is to be feared that in many cases it never occurs to the photographer that almost all his chemicals are dangerous poisons. Cyanide of potassium is, he knows, fatal if taken internally, and bichloride of mercury also; but he is probably not so familiar with the fact that the latter poison is rapidly absorbed by the skin, and very dangerous in its action. Dr. Alfred Taylor, in his work on poisons, says, "There is reason to believe that, both in respect to themselves and their patients, medical men are not sufficiently aware of the absorbent powers of the unbroken skin in reference to this poison;" and he mentions a case of a M. Cloquet, who employed a solution of this salt to cleanse his hands of some anatomical preparation upon which he had been working. He did not immediately wash his hands to remove the solution, and in eight hours was attacked with severe pain in the abdomen, constriction in the chest, painful respiration, thirst, nausea, and other dangerous symptoms, which were not entirely removed by treatment for eight days. The case of a shepherd is reported who was engaged in applying locally a solution of bichloride of mercury to sheep suffering from a cutaneous disorder. He was seized with salivation and symptoms of mercurial poisoning, and finally with disease of the bones. After recovery he again undertook his duties, and again used the solution, and again succumbed, finally dying from the secondary effects of mercury. If the skin be abraded when this solution comes into contact with it, all the symptoms of acute mercurial poisoning follow.

Against the possible evil effects of chloride of gold our correspondent warns the reader. We pointed out, some time ago, the dangerous ulcers caused by the contact of bichromate of potash coming into contact with a lesion of the skin, or with the mucous membrane. Sulphate of iron, generally regarded as altogether harmless in external application, has been known to produce injurious consequences, headache, sickness, colic, with muscular pain and contraction having resulted from the repeated contact of this salt with the hands. We wish it to be remembered that none of these