A Dependable Remedy for the Poison Ivy Group

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Although many substances have been suggested as remedies for poison oak (*Rhus diversiloba* T. and G.) and poison ivy (*Rhus Toxicodendron* L.), there is one above all others which because of the uniqueness of its discovery, the scientific proof of its action, and the abundant evidence for its efficacy should be of special interest to all sufferers from these plants.

When the plant poison was obtained appreciably free from contamination it was found to consist of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. The oxygen was found to be in the hydroxyl groups and not in carbonyl or carboxyl groups. Because of the presence of hydroxyl groups it was thought the principal constituent of the poison might contain a phenol group. The poison of poison ivy and poison oak were found to give similar chemical tests (McNair 1923, p. 86). One of the tests for the presence of a phenol group consists of the addition of iron (ferric) chloride to a highly dilute alcoholic solution of the substance. If the phenol group is present the solution first turns green. Upon the further addition of sodium carbonate the green solution turns red.

Upon the addition of more ferric chloride to the alcoholic solution of the poison the green solution turned black and finally a black precipitate was formed (McNair 1921, 1923). When this solution as well as the black precipitate were placed on the skin of a person highly susceptible to poison oak no symptoms of poisoning occurred.

The use of iron chloride to the extent of five per cent in a half and half mixture of alcohol and water is recommended as a remedy.

If the hands and face are bathed freely in this solution either before or immediately after one goes into a region known to contain poison ivy or its kindred plants, no ill effects need be expected.

In order to eliminate the "personal equation" in regard to this remedy, the following experiences are given of Captain Fred C. Mills of the Boy Scouts of America and Major Thomas R. Marshall, U. S. Army Medical Corps, Retired.

"Last spring when I found I had been affected on the hands by ivy, I gave them an extra heavy dose of ferric chloride solution all over, went out and pulled up a bunch of poison ivy, broke it up and rubbed it thoroughly over both hands. Nothing happened. So, as far as I am concerned it is quite evident that this solution . . . is successful. I have used it a great deal on other people, and am delighted with its effectiveness." (Captain Fred C. Mills.)

"The undersigned has for years used tincture of ferric chloride (standard solution), by local application, both as a preventative and cure, in *Rhus Toxicodendron* poisoning, with uniform success. In his experience the treatment is specific, and should be used in all stages of the eruption; however, the earlier the better. While stationed at Fort Barrancas, Florida; Fort Scriven, Georgia; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Camp Dix, New Jersey, and Fort Schuyler, New

York, many cases of *Rhus Toxicondendron* poisoning were encountered among troops, and the treatment as indicated above was invariably used, to the exclusion of all others. The only possible objection to its use is the discoloration of the skin. However, this is infinitesimal compared to the unsightliness of the eruption, the accompanying discomfort, and the temporary disability in some cases." (Major Thomas R. Marshall.)

LITERATURE CITED

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