

THE MEDICINAL QUALITIES OF THE SCROPHULARIA MARILANDICA.

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THE genus *Scrophularia*, which has been selected as the type of an extensive and interesting natural family of plants, has hitherto been considered as possessing but unimportant medical properties. The natural order to which it belongs is well known to embrace many species which possess active and efficient properties, and form some of the most reliable articles in the materia medica. We will here briefly enumerate the principal ones:—

Gratiola—a drastic cathartic and emetic.

Digitalis—a narcotic, sedative and diuretic.

Leptandra—recent root, a violent cathartic.

Antirrhinum—a diuretic and cathartic ; sometimes used as an emollient application.

Verbascum—a demulcent, emollient and anodyne.

Scrophularia nodosa—an European plant, a reputed anodyne and diuretic.

Torrenia Asiatica—used in India as a cure for gonorrhœa.

Scoparia dulcis—employed by the Spanish Indians, in infusion, as a cure for agues.

Other genera possess no medical properties—as the *Mimulus guttata*, the leaves of which are used as salad.

The order *Scrophulariaceæ*, as now constituted, embraces in three subdivisions 19 genera and 104 species of native North American plants. The genus *Scrophularia* embraces 3 species. The most common, and by far the most important of these, is the *S. Marilandica*, which is believed to possess most valuable medical properties, and which the writer believes cannot fail to bring it into extensive use among the profession, whenever its properties shall become generally known and appreciated.

This plant grows abundantly throughout the northern and eastern States, preferring a loose rich soil, blossoming in July and August; and readily recognized by its slender naked spike of green and purplish globose inconspicuous flowers. The only use to which it has hitherto been applied, so far as can be learned from systematic treatises, is that of an emollient and anodyne application to bruises and painful tumors. Its name would seem to indicate that some species of this genus once possessed a reputation for the cure of scrofula ; but whatever circumstance may have given origin to its name, it may be safely doubted whether the plant in question could be considered efficacious in this disease.

My attention was first directed to the medicinal properties of this plant, about five years since, by finding it extensively used in northern New York, under the name of “woman’s friend,” as a popular remedy among pregnant women, as an anodyne to allay the symptoms of restlessness, anxiety and vigilance on the part of the mother, and quiet the motions of the foetus—symptoms that often harass and render miserable the parturient female, while they are of such a nature as to seldom require an application to a physician for advice.

There is nothing more familiar than the fact, that the period of gestation is characterized by disturbances in the economy, unknown in health, and which re-appear at each successive pregnancy, in nearly the same order as at first. To those that pertain to the last half of this period, our attention is more particularly directed. From the period when the uterus ascends above the brim of the pelvis, and the increased size of the fœtus becomes apparent from the distension of the abdominal parietes, there supervene various disturbances in the system, from the unaccustomed burden and distension of the uterus, and occasioning various unpleasant symptoms; among which *inquietude, inability to sleep*, and very sensible and unpleasant sensations from the motions of the fœtus, are the more important. These motions of the fœtus are commonly divided into *active* and *passive*. The active motions are first experienced about the end of the fourth month, when they consist of an obscure vibratory sensation, which may be excited by the application of cold, or any stimulating cause. These gradually increase, till, at the end of the seventh month, they at times become painful, and the motions are visible externally. During the eighth and ninth months, the fœtus becomes fixed in the uterus, and the active motions, although energetic, are more limited. The passive motions are only developed by the examination of the accoucheur, and as they give rise to no ordinary uneasiness on the part of the mother, they will not here be considered. At times a false sensation may be experienced, from motions in the abdominal viscera; but the cases may be considered rare in which no unpleasant sensations are experienced during pregnancy from the causes above specified.

Since my attention has been directed to this subject, I have been able to observe about forty cases in which the plant under consideration has been advised, and in nearly every instance with decided benefit. In three instances, no marked effect could be observed. In one instance an over-dose was taken, and the motions of the fœtus ceased so suddenly, that the woman became alarmed lest she had destroyed it. No unfavorable result, however, ensued, and at her full time she was delivered of a healthy child. In the remaining cases there was a decided effect produced. Soon after taking the medicine the motions would cease, and if taken at bed-time the patient would fall into a sound and refreshing sleep. From what has been observed of it I have arrived at the conclusion that this plant possesses gentle narcotic properties, and that it operates as a sedative to the nervous system of the fœtus, through the medium of the maternal circulation.

No satisfactory experiments have been instituted to ascertain the precise principle in the plant, to which we are indebted for its medical virtues. It yields an extract to water, alcohol and ether. The ethereal extract preserves, in an eminent degree, the taste and sensible properties of the fresh root. From some imperfect examination, I was led to suspect the presence of an alkaloid peculiar to this plant.

The form which I have found most eligible for the administration is an aqueous infusion, prepared from the fresh root. About one ounce of the root may be steeped in a pint of water, and from two to four

ounces may be taken on retiring to rest, or during the day, whenever the symptoms become unpleasant. Like many other medical plants of temperate latitudes, the properties are in a measure lost by drying. The form of alcoholic tincture would doubtless prove the best to preserve its properties from loss, and insure uniformity of action.

From what has been observed of the action of this medicine, it is confidently recommended to the medical public, with the belief that it furnishes a remedy for the cases specified, which admit of palliation with safety and certainty by no other.

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Cholera in New York.—Dr. Page, whose elaborate and comprehensive work on epidemic cholera, we understand, will be published by the Harpers, has just returned from New York, where he has been expressly to investigate the nature of the disease as it exists in that city. He saw nothing especially alarming in its character, and thinks it by no means generally epidemic. It appears in a milder and more manageable form than that of the South and West, and under appropriate treatment need not be half as fatal. He has promised us a letter upon the subject, which shall appear in our next number.

New Hampshire Asylum for the Insane.—With the experience they have had, the purse of the State to draw upon, and the prayers and good wishes of all benevolent people, there is no reason to fear that the institution at Concord will fall short of the expectations of the friends of humanity. Especially will this be the case while men of intelligence are the pillars upon which the medical superintendent is permitted to lean for support. Where men of little capacities, ninepenny economists, and ignorance clothed with authority, become the counsellors for the management of lunatics, there will be more madness outside than within the walls. One half the physicians of these excellent establishments are at times harassed, as well as enfeebled and thwarted, through the perverse meddling of ignoramus, whom the legislature selects for a very different purpose.

At Concord, we imagine that Dr. McFarland is surrounded by gentlemen of enlarged views and generous sentiments; and further, that he accomplishes all that can be expected of him. When his report went to press, there were 118 patients in the asylum. Just one year ago, there were 109; 81 were admitted during that period; whole number through the year, 190; discharged 76—of whom 36 recovered, 15 partially, 11 remained stationary, and 14 died.

More room is wanted in the buildings. The same cry that reaches the State House in Boston, from the Worcester institution, will soon be repeated in the ears of the legislators of New Hampshire. The neatness of this report, in its typographical finish, is highly creditable to the firm of Messrs. Butterfield & Hill.