

but found that the same weight yielded less starch on every trial than the West-India roots, those of the *Maranta arundinacea*, and *Dioscorea triphylla* excepted. Perhaps this may be attributed to their having been long kept; for there can be no doubt of potatoes being possessed of extraordinary nutritive qualities: I cannot help thinking, however, that the inhabitants of these islands are at no loss for substitutes equally wholesome, and as nourishing.

Dominica,

May 21, 1796.

✓ **XXVII.** *A fatal Instance of the poisonous Effects of the Oenanthe Crocata Linn. or Hemlock Dropwort. Communicated in a Letter to Dr. Simmons, by Robert Graves, M. D. Physician at Dorchester, and Extra Licentiate of the College of Physicians, London.*

AMONG the numerous poisonous plants with which the vegetable kingdom
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 abounds,

abounds, there are few, perhaps, natives of this country, more virulent and speedy in their effects, than that which gave birth to the following melancholy incident; in confirmation of which, indeed, too many fatal examples are to be found, scattered in the writings of medical men. Against so destructive an enemy to mankind, therefore, it behoves us to be particularly on our guard; and every unhappy instance wherein the contrary takes place ought not, in my opinion, to be suffered to pass wholly unrecorded. It is only from being made acquainted with the errors or defective caution of others, that we, in many cases, become mindful to keep clear of such ourselves.

A young woman, about twenty-four years of age, servant to a lady in this neighbourhood, having been recommended by a medical practitioner of eminence, to take the juice of the water-parsnep for an eruptive complaint in her face, became exceedingly desirous of trying it in the month of May last. The gardener of the family was applied to, and earnestly entreated by her to collect the plant; but from its not being sufficiently known to him, he at first hesitated, very properly, to comply with her request. It happened, that in a moist watery

ditch or brook, within a short distance of the house where she lived, a large quantity of hemlock dropwort was growing. This unfortunately she discovered, and conceiving, both from its smell and appearance, to be the herb which she was in quest of, she communicated the same to the gardener, with an express declaration, that if he would not gather some for her, she would undertake to do it herself. The gardener being thus forcibly solicited, and not aware of the virulent and deadly nature of the plant which he was about to furnish her with, was at length brought to compliance.

On the morning of the 19th of the same month, being plentifully supplied with the whole plant, she took the roots of it, bruised them herself, and expressed from them, as it was supposed, juice to the amount of two table spoonfuls at least, which she swallowed. Scarcely had more than ten or fifteen minutes elapsed afterwards, before she complained of great giddiness, accompanied with vast uneasiness and sickness at stomach, though not such as to be succeeded by vomiting; convulsions likewise speedily supervened, and she became entirely deprived of her senses.

It was about half an hour after this, when I

was

was called to her assistance. At that period the convulsive paroxysms were become not only stronger, but recurred in quicker succession; all sensibility was destroyed; the mouth firmly open, with scarce any pulse to be felt at the wrist, and a coldness had seized the extremities. Prior to my seeing her, repeated draughts of milk and oil had been got down, agreeably to the advice of Mr. Arden, a judicious and experienced surgeon of this place, but without the least apparent effect, or sickness, succeeding. Wishing, therefore, if possible, notwithstanding the truly hopeless state of the case, to solicit a discharge of the poison as the most effectual step towards affording relief, an emetic was immediately sent for; but though it arrived in the short space of ten or twelve minutes, she did not survive even to take it. Besides the repeated draughts of milk and oil above mentioned, between two and three ounces of vinegar also were forced down, at my direction, from an idea that this acid might act somewhat as a corrective.

I shall close this case with a very necessary caution, and which I think cannot be too strongly impressed on the minds of medical men. Though that species of the water-parsnep,

(*Sium nodiflorum* Linn.) directed by the London college, bears but little resemblance indeed to the hemlock dropwort; yet from the fatal error here related, joined to a similar one, which happened also in this county but a few years since*, practitioners, I conceive, ought on no account, whenever they should deem it proper to recommend the former plant, to trust to unskilful people to gather it. Both plants are to be found frequently inhabiting the very same moist, watery situations; and the ignorant and unwary are as likely to be imposed upon by the latter, as to have their choice determined, or attention drawn by the former.

Dorchester,
October 21, 1796.

* London Medical Journal, Vol. 5, p. 192.