

VII. *An account of the effects of the Astragalus exscapus Linn. in the cure of the Venereal Disease; in a letter* from A. Crichton, M. D. to Chr. Girtanner, M. D. corresponding member of the Royal Society at Gottingen. Translated from the German.*

AS you seem, my dear friend, very anxious to get information concerning the use and effects of the astragalus exscapus, and have requested me to send you my notes of the cases in which I saw it employed, during my stay at Vienna, I communicate them to you with great pleasure. I am fearful, however, that the cases will not appear to you sufficiently accurate, as I had not time to write down the daily changes produced by the remedy, and have omitted to mention in my journal the temperament and habit of body of the several patients. You will find nothing more than their ages, their symptoms at the time of their admission into the hospital, the length of time the medicine was employed, and the effects which might fairly be attributed to its use.

* This letter is extracted from the first volume of a treatise on the venereal disease, by Dr. Girtanner, lately published at Gottingen. See the catalogue of books.

Before I give you these brief notes of the cases in question, permit me first to premise a few observations on the history of the remedy, on the circumstances that led to a more accurate trial of its effects, and the manner in which it was employed in all the instances here related.

This plant, till of late, was equally unknown to physicians and botanists. Linnæus, it is true, mentions it, but without describing it, having never seen the plant. Dr. Jacquin, professor of botany at Vienna, means, however, as he informed me in a conversation I had with him lately (in May 1787) on this subject, soon to publish a figure and description of this plant*.

So far as I can learn it was professor Winterl, at Pest, who first made known the antivenereal powers of this remedy. Some years ago he wrote word to his friends in Vienna, that on the borders of Hungary a domestic

* In a fasciculus of Professor Jacquins's *Icones Plantarum rariorum*, published since the date mentioned by Dr. Crichton, we find a figure of the *astragalus exscapus*, (which is copied by Dr. Girtanner in the work from which the present article is extracted) with a reference to the second volume of his collectanea, in which we may expect a botanical description of the plant. EDITOR.

remedy, which consisted of a decoction of the astragalus exscapus, was employed with a very good effect, in the cure of the venereal disease. Baron Stoerck, on hearing this, was desirous that Dr. Quarin, as director of the general hospital at Vienna, should make some experiments with this plant, in order to ascertain its effects with greater accuracy. A short account of the first three cases in which it was tried, is to be found in the book lately published by Dr. Quarin, under the title of *Animadversiones practicae in diversos morbos*.

In the selection of patients, for these experiments, such only were admitted as declared, that before their coming to the hospital they had made use of no remedy for the venereal disease ; but in cases of this sort, in hospitals, as you well know, we cannot trust implicitly to the assertions of the patients.

They were all of them under the care of Drs. Quarin and Zeller ; and where no contra-indications were present, were allowed a full and nourishing diet. The apartment in which they were placed was large, and lofty, and the air was frequently renewed. In the winter it was kept warm by means of a stove ; and during the treatment the patients were not permitted to go out of the room.

In

In all these cases the astragalus was prescribed in the manner following :

R. Radicis Astragali exscapi unc.
semiff.
Coque in aquæ puræ unc. quin-
decim, donec libra superfit. Su-
mat aeger tepide mane, ac ves-
peri.

Of the following histories of cases the first four are copied from the register belonging to the hospital; of the other six I was myself an eye-witness.

CASE I.

A woman, forty years old, was admitted into the hospital, July 26, 1785. She had two venereal nodes on the left parietal bone, and both were in a state of ulceration. She had also another considerable node on the left tibia, but which was not yet ulcerated. She took a dose of purgative salt, and afterwards began with the astragalus exscapus, prepared in the manner above described. She continued the use of this medicine morning and evening, till the first of September, when she was discharged from the hospital, cured. The two ulcerated nodes, during the treatment, were dressed simply with digestive ointment.—

The

The node on the tibia gradually diminished, and had entirely disappeared before she quitted the hospital. The patient sweated profusely during the whole of the time she took the medicine.

CASE II.

A woman, twenty years old, was admitted into the hospital September the 20th, 1785. She had two venereal nodes, one on the tibia, the other on the forehead, but neither of them was ulcerated. She left the hospital on the 5th of December following, thoroughly cured; and during this time had taken nothing but the decoction of asragalus. At first it purged her violently, but this effect soon went off; and afterwards, till the end of the treatment, she voided a greater quantity of urine than usual.

CASE III.

A woman, twenty years old, was admitted into the hospital, October the 6th, 1785. She had a venereal tophus on one tibia, and venereal blotches on the face. On the 19th of November, of the same year, she was discharged, cured. This patient likewise took nothing

thing but the astragalus; and it seemed to increase the secretion of urine considerably.

CASE IV.

A girl, fifteen years old, was admitted into the hospital, May 14, 1786. She had a gonorrhœa, and two tophi on the tibia of one foot. She took a saline purge, and afterwards the decoction of astragalus, without any other remedy. She persevered in its use till the 18th of July, on which day she was discharged, thoroughly cured.

CASE V.

A woman, twenty-nine years old, came into the hospital, November 29, 1786, with a gonorrhœa, two large condylomata on the labia pudendi, two buboes, and a tophus on the os frontis. She immediately began taking the decoction of astragalus, and during the first three weeks it sweated her profusely. After this she got the itch; but this did not prevent her continuing the use of the astragalus till January 29, 1787, on which day she was discharged, cured.

CASE

CASE VI.

Magdalena Jaeger, eighteen years old, was admitted into the hospital, on the 25th of January, 1787. She had a gonorrhœa, condylomata on the labia pudendi, swelling of the inguinal glands, and the itch. She began the use of the decoction of astragalus the evening she was admitted, and continued it till the first of March following, when she left the hospital perfectly cured. She sweated profusely during the cure. She took no other medicine than the astragalus.

CASE VII.

Sufanna Caton, thirty-seven years old, came into the hospital, February 8, 1787. She had a gonorrhœa, and a small node on the os frontis. After eight days use of the astragalus, the node was almost entirely gone, but the gonorrhœa remained as before. She sweated profusely, and the sweat had a strong and disagreeable smell. Some days after this she contracted the itch; but she still continued the use of the decoction of astragalus, and both the gonorrhœa and the itch seemed

to be better, as she was discharged May 2, at her own request.

CASE VIII.

Joseph Koenig, aged twenty-seven years, came into the hospital, April 26, 1787. He had a large, painful tophus on the radius of the left arm, which was already in part ulcerated; another ulcerated tophus on the middle of the eighth rib of the left side, and a third on the left clavicle. He immediately began with the decoction of astragalus, and some of it was applied also to the ulcers. Before the 21st of June the tophi were thoroughly gone, and the ulcers healed, so that he was dismissed cured. In this case, during the treatment, the urinary secretion was greatly increased.

CASE IX.

Anna Straffer, forty-four years old, came into the hospital, April 18, 1787. Her face and head were completely covered with a dry, brown, scaly eruption, which, from her own account, and from her mode of life, were supposed to be venereal. She had likewise a gonorrhœa. She continued the use

use of the astragalus for several weeks, without the least diminution of the eruption, altho' the gonorrhœa gradually went off. Her hair was now cut off, and her head covered with cloths dipped in a decoction of astragalus. A slight suppuration took place under the scales, which were soft, and gradually fell off; and she left the hospital, cured, June the 4th, 1787.

When one reads these cases, and observes the excellent effects the astragalus produced in them, it seems to be a very valuable remedy. In not one of them did it prove inefficacious. There are, however, at Vienna, some physicians who have not been equally successful with it in their experiments; and Professor Hunczowsky has assured me, that in his own private practice he has used a considerable quantity of this root, but has seen no good effects from it, and therefore has never persevered in its use longer than a fortnight.

In one case I myself have seen it administered without any effect. Still this proves, in my opinion, nothing against the antivenereal power of this remedy; for I am convinced, that in this case the principal symptoms, at the time the astragalus was had re-

course to, were not so much owing to the venereal virus, as to an improper use of mercury.

CASE X.

A woman, forty years old, was admitted into the hospital, in the beginning of December, 1786. The tonsils and uvula were entirely destroyed; the bones of the nose were carious, and the fores discharged a thin, ill-conditioned, bloody matter. She had been twice salivated, and during the salivation the extent of the ulcers had diminished. By the use of the decoction of astragalus she seemed at first to mend, as the ulcers looked better and redder, and began to heal. But these good effects were not long apparent, and the disease after this seemed to be at a stand, or at least mended extremely slowly, till the end of August, 1787, at which time I quitted Vienna.

The astragalus, besides its anti-venereal properties, is said to possess others which render it very important to physicians, but which I have had no opportunity of ascertaining by my own experience, namely, its good effects in rheumatic, and (sometimes very improperly so called) gouty pains. Professor Hunczowsky, who, as

I have already observed, will allow no antivenereal property to the astragalus, assures me, however, that in complaints of the kind just now mentioned, he has often experienced the most striking good effects from the use of this remedy.

This is all I have seen or heard of, for or against the effects of the astragalus exscapus; and I have no doubt but you will agree with me in opinion, that this new remedy, altho' it may not be an actual specific for the lues venerea, deserves, however, to be considered as a valuable addition to the *Materia Medica*.

CATALOGUE OF BOOKS.

1. **C**ONSIDERATIONS on Bilious Diseases; and some particular Affections of the Liver and the Gall Bladder. By *John Andree*, M. D. 8vo. Hertford, 1788.

2. An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species. To which are added, Strictures on Lord Kaimes's Discourse on the original Diversity of Mankind. By the Rev. *Samuel Stanhope Smith*, D. D. Vice President