

DESCRIPTIONS
OF
NEW REMEDIES
INTRODUCED INTO THE PRACTICE OF
MEDICINE,
WITH THEIR THERAPEUTICAL EFFECTS.

No. X.

VERBASCUM THAPSUS (MULLEIN).

THIS common, well-known and widely-diffused plant has hitherto been regarded as having very little remedial value. Such dispensatories as have admitted it have spoken only of its demulcent and emollient properties, adding, that it is thought to be slightly anodyne. It is much used on the continent in catarrhs, in infusion or decoction, and as an emollient fomentation. The leaves are also boiled in lard to form an ointment.

Dr. W. Wilson, of Maryland, U.S., highly recommends mullein for coughs and chronic bronchitis. The mode of using it is smoking the dried leaves like tobacco. A pipeful smoked two or three times a day, he alleges, relieves irritation, promotes expectoration, acts as a salivative, and, if persevered in, effects a complete cure.

Dr. Wilson says: "I myself for ten years was a sufferer from chronic bronchitis. Every evening I became hoarse, and experienced great pain, dryness of the trachea, and constant desire to clear my throat, which in doing not only disturbed my own slumbers, but annoyed others. I tried cauterization as low as possible with nitrate of silver, counter irritation, expectorants, and inhalation, but all to no purpose; finally, I commenced to smoke the mullein, and nothing could have been more speedy and efficient in procuring relief."

The following is from Dr. Gardner:—"I have for some time past been desirous of finding a drug possessed of calmative or narcotic properties, as a substitute for opium and its alkaloids, for administration in catarrhal coughs, bronchitis, and asthma, and to induce sleep in patients who suffer from headache and other unpleasant effects after even small doses of ordinary narcotics. Having tried several with more or less success, I was led to experiment with the *Verbascum thapsus*, or common *mullein*. This plant has a popular reputation in some localities in bronchial affections. An infusion or decoction of the leaves is for the most part used for the purpose, and is deemed to be useful as an expectorant and demulcent. Noticing in one of the old "Herbals" that mullein has been employed to stupefy fish, I assumed it must be to some extent a narcotic. I therefore had a tincture prepared for me by Mr. Bullock from the flower-stalks, just as it was coming to seed. This tincture is of a dark rich brown colour, looking like tincture of opium, and apparently contains a large proportion of solid material. I have used it extensively, and for more than twelve months, and have found it more reliable than any narcotic, except opium and salts of morphia. In doses of one drachm to one and a half drachms it produces calm sleep, and in no case have I yet seen it followed by headache or other unpleasant sequelæ of narcotism. For coughs and bronchitis, both acute and chronic, in combination with the usual remedies, it has the soothing effects so much desired, while it does not suddenly arrest secretion, as opium has a tendency to do. It has been found useful also in some cases of asthma. I regard it as being much more active and certain than *hyoscyamus*. From these properties, and its apparent especial influence on the mucous membrane of the bronchia, it appears to me well worthy of adoption by the profession. It would be advisable, I think, to try the different parts of the plant separately, the flowers, seed-capsules, and seeds, as well as the stalks, leaves, and root."

GELSEMINUM SEMPERVIRENS (YELLOW JASMINE).

Our readers will perceive by our advertising columns that several pharmacutists have anticipated a demand for many of the new American remedies not yet noticed in these papers. Amongst these there are several deserving the attention and careful experiment of English practitioners. As we have re-

marked already, we cannot attach the same importance to the testimony of American physicians to the remedial properties of these drugs as we do to that offered us by practitioners at home. Essential differences of climate, constitution of patients, modes of living, and the phenomena of diseases exist. Any of these may modify the effects of medicines. But whatever weight we may be disposed to allow to observations made in America, there are few of these remedies which have given rise to more publication than the *Gelsemium sempervirens*.

The story respecting the discovery of its medicinal properties is thus told:—"A planter of Mississippi, while labouring under a severe attack of bilious fever, which resisted all the usual remedies, sent a servant into his garden to procure a certain medicinal root, and prepare an infusion for him to drink. The servant, by mistake, collected another root, and gave an infusion of it to his master, who soon after swallowing it was seized with a complete loss of muscular power, unable to move a limb, or even to raise his eyelids, although he could hear, and was cognizant of circumstances transpiring around him. He was expected by his friends every moment to breathe his last. After some hours he gradually recovered, and was astonished to find his fever had left him. Ascertaining what plant it was he had taken, he employed it with great success on his plantation and in the neighbourhood."

It first fell into the hands of some person, who prepared and sold it as a secret nostrum. It subsequently was employed by the American sect calling themselves Eclectics, and afterwards by regular physicians. By the latter it has been used with alleged success in a variety of inflammatory and febrile diseases; but its greatest use is said to be in idiopathic fevers.

Dr. Wood thus sums up the statements of numerous writers: "It appears to be a nervous sedative, without nauseating or purgative properties, but sometimes causing diaphoresis. In moderate doses it produces agreeable sensations of languor with muscular relaxation, so that the patient finds some difficulty in moving the eyelids or keeping the jaws closed. More largely taken, it produces dizziness, dimness of vision, dilated pupil, general muscular debility, and universal prostration, reducing the frequency and force of the pulse, and the frequency of respiration, and producing insensibility to pain, but without stupor or delirium. After a short time these symptoms pass off, leaving no unpleasant effects. It usually begins to act in half an hour, and ceases to act after one or two hours. It is no doubt capable of causing death in over-doses, and must therefore be used cautiously."

A tincture of *gelseminum* is used, prepared by macerating eight ounces of the fresh root in two pints of diluted alcohol. This is considered to be a saturated tincture. It has a violet tinge, a peculiar odour something like new honey, and a taste not unpleasant. The dose is from ten to fifty drops, given in water; one or two doses sufficing to produce its characteristic effect—a dropping of the eyelids. In typhoid or typhus fever, not more than from three to eight drops should be given, the larger doses being adapted only to cases of a sthenic character. The sign of its action on the muscular system is, it is said, attended by a remarkable cessation of the febrile symptoms. But they are apt to recur after a few hours, unless the remedy be combined with a full dose of quinine, which prevents the recurrence.

As the plant is a native of the Southern States of North America only, it is probable that the fresh root will not be obtainable in this country. As a substitute for it and the tincture, a preparation is on sale here under the name of *gelseminine*. It appears to be prepared by precipitating the tincture, in the manner described in former papers as practised by American pharmacutists, and rendering the precipitate into the state of powder by triturating with two parts of sugar-of-milk. Whether this will exhibit the same properties as are alleged of the tincture remains to be seen. It is also an open question whether the dried root can with success be substituted for the fresh.

If we can believe the statements of the writers who have written upon this plant, it would appear that it is a direct sedative, acting specially on the nerves which minister to muscular motion, as chloroform and ether act on the nerves of sensation. How this physiological effect ministers to the cure of fevers we leave for discussion when its remedial powers have been tested and confirmed. In the mean time it must be remembered that we have only what is likely to prove a very imperfect preparation to employ. The identification of the plant and its root, and some efficient preparation, by English botanists and pharmacutists, are the desiderata.

In conclusion, it may be remarked that one author states that full and frequent doses of *gelseminum* weaken the heart, and greatly protract complete recovery from low fevers.