

XLI. CANNABIS INDICA.

SYNONYMS. Indian Hemp, Gunjah.

Dr. Pereira* states, that the Cannabis, which grows in India and has been described by some botanists under the name *Cannabis Indica*, does not appear to him to possess any specific differences from the common hemp, *Cannabis sativa*; and accordingly, by many botanists, they have been regarded as identical.

The narcotic effects have been long known to the people of Southern Africa, South America, Turkey, Egypt, Asia Minor, India, and the adjacent countries of the Malays, Burmese, and Siamese, by whom it is used in various forms to induce intoxication. It is, likewise, extensively employed in popular practice in various diseases. In Western Europe its use is unknown, and it is questionable, whether the hemp of that region or of

* *Elements of Materia Medica*, 2d edit. p. 1096. Lond. 1842.

this country be possessed of the same properties. Dr. O'Shaughnessy states, that the extraordinary symptoms produced by the oriental plant depend upon a resinous secretion with which it abounds, and which seems to be wholly absent in the European plant. The absence of the resinous secretion, and consequent want of narcotic power, he ascribes to difference of climate.

Within the last few years, Dr. O'Shaughnessy, of Calcutta,* has detailed many interesting facts in regard to the therapeutic agency of this plant, which, "we doubt not" — says a recent writer† — "will cause a great sensation among the members of the profession throughout the world."

In certain seasons, and in warm countries, a resinous juice exudes, and concretes on the leaves, slender stems and flowers of the Cannabis. This constitutes the *churrus* of Nipal and Hindusthan, and in it reside the powers of all the preparations of hemp. This resin—*cannabin*— is very soluble in alcohol and ether; partially soluble in alkaline, but insoluble in acid, solutions. When pure, it is of a blackish-grey colour; it is hard at 90° Fahrenheit, but softens at higher temperatures, and fuses readily. It is soluble in the fixed, and in several volatile oils. Its odour is fragrant and narcotic; taste slightly warm, bitterish and acrid. The dried hemp plant, which has flowered, and from which the resin has not been removed, is called *Gunjah*. It yields to alcohol twenty *per cent.* of resinous extract, composed of the resin — *churrus* — and green colouring matter. The *Gunjah* is used for smoking. The larger leaves and capsules, without the stalks, constitute *Sidhee*, *Subjee*, or *Bang*, which is used to form with water an intoxicating drink. When the plant is distilled with a large quantity of water, traces of volatile oil pass over, and the distilled liquor has the powerful narcotic odour of the plant.

EFFECTS ON THE ECONOMY IN HEALTH.

The effects of this remedy would appear to have been well known to the Arabian and Persian physicians of both modern and ancient periods; but the first person, who seems to have well tested its properties is Dr. O'Shaughnessy. In his various experiments, he did not observe the least indication of pain, or any degree of convulsive movement. They all, he affirms, "led to one remarkable result, — that while carnivorous animals and fish, dogs, cats, swine, vultures, crows, and adjutants invariably and speedily exhibited the intoxicating influence of the drug, the

* On the Preparations of Indian Hemp, or *Gunjah (Cannabis Indica)*, &c., Calcutta, 1839; and Brit. and For. Med. Rev. July, 1840, p. 224.

† Brit. and For. Med. Rev. loc. cit.

graminivorous,—such as the horse, deer, monkey, goat, sheep, and cow,—experienced but trivial effects from any dose that was administered.” Encouraged by these results, Dr. O’Shaughnessy felt no hesitation as to the perfect safety of giving the resin of hemp an extensive trial in cases in which its apparent powers promised the greatest degree of utility.

The general effects observed on man were alleviation of pain in most cases, remarkable augmentation of the appetite, aphrodisia, and great mental cheerfulness. The more violent effects were a peculiar form of delirium, and a cataleptic state.

Dr. Pereira* experimented on some specimens of Gunjah and Nipalese churrus, which were sent to him by Dr. O’Shaughnessy. He tried them both on animals and man, and gave specimens of them to medical friends; but their effects were found to be comparatively slight. “Whether,”—says Dr. Pereira,—“this be owing to the preparations having undergone some deterioration in their passage, or to the comparative phlegmatic temperament of the English, I know not. My experiments on animals were made in the Lecture-room of the London Hospital before the students of the Materia Medica class; and the trials on the human subject were made in the wards of the hospital.”

EFFECTS ON THE ECONOMY IN DISEASE.

Indian hemp was prescribed by Dr. O’Shaughnessy in various diseases. In *rheumatism*, acute and chronic, the results were not very satisfactory. In one case, the most marked catalepsy supervened along with the usual intoxicating effects. In a case of *hydrophobia*, the soothing influence of the remedy was very great; but the disease terminated fatally. In *cholera*, he considered its agency to be “promising, and to deserve the attention of the practitioner.” The testimony is strongest in regard to its influence in *traumatic tetanus*; of which Dr. O’Shaughnessy refers to fourteen cases: of these, *nine* appear to have recovered. From the results of these cases, he concludes, that the resin of hemp, given boldly and in large doses, is capable of arresting effectually the progress of that formidable disease, “and in a large proportion of cases, of effecting a perfect cure;”—and further; “that in hemp the profession has gained an anticonvulsive remedy of the greatest value.”

With such strong evidence in its favour, it is certainly important, that Indian hemp should be subjected to a full and fair trial; and even admitting that it may fall short of the character given of it by Dr. O’Shaughnessy, it can scarcely fail to be an important addition to our Materia Medica.

* Elements of Mat. Med. 2d edit. ii. 1098. Lond. 1842.

MODE OF ADMINISTERING.

The preparations used by Dr. O'Shaughnessy are the following:—

Extractum cannabis Indicæ alcoholicum.

Resinous or alcoholic extract of Indian hemp.

This is prepared by boiling the rich adhesive tops of the dried *Gunjah* in alcohol (.835) until all the resin is dissolved. The tincture, thus obtained, is evaporated to dryness in a vessel placed over a pot of boiling water.

In *hydrophobia*, the resin in soft pill, to the amount of ten to twenty grains, is directed to be chewed by the patient, and to be repeated according to the effect.

Tinctura cannabis Indicæ.

Tincture of Indian hemp.

R. Extract. cannab. indic. alcohol. gr. xxiv.
Alcohol. dilut. f.ʒj.

Of this a dram is given in *tetanus* every half hour, until the paroxysms cease, or catalepsy is induced. In *cholera*, ten drops given every half hour were often found to check the vomiting and purging, and bring back warmth to the surface. Dr. O'Shaughnessy's experience leads him to prefer small doses of the remedy in order to excite rather than narcotize the patient.