

CANNABIS INDICA.

[Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

MESSRS. EDITORS,—If you think the following communication worthy a place in your valuable JOURNAL, it is at your service.

The narcotic effects of Cannabis have been long known to the people of the East, as we have been informed by those who have travelled there, also the wonderful effects it has upon those who use it for the purpose of intoxication. This probably led to its use as a medicine. Herodotus mentions the hemp plant, and states

that the Scythians who cultivated it made themselves garments of it. He also adds, that they threw the seeds on red-hot stones, and used the perfumed vapor thereby obtained, as a bath, which excited them to excess of exaltation. This is supposed to be produced by the intoxicating properties of its smoke.—(*Pereira on Cannabis Indica.*) Dr. Royle mentions that the hemp might have been used as the assuager of grief, of which Homer speaks. It is stated that it has long been known in India and many other countries, as an increaser of pleasure, the exciter of desire, the cementer of friendship, the causer of a reeling gait, the laughter-mover, and causing in those who use it familiarly as intoxicating spirits, a heavy, lazy state, reveries, and the supervention of sleep usually in a few hours.

Dr. Simpson says, the anodyne, ecstatic and anæsthetic effects of Indian hemp, and the various preparations made from it, have long been known in Africa and Asia. He states, that "Sir Joseph Banks says, it is always taken in Barbary, when it can be procured, by criminals condemned to suffer amputation, and it is said to enable those wretches to bear the rough operations of an unfeeling executioner, better than we Europeans can the keen knife of our most skilful surgeons." M. Julien lately pointed out to the French Academy an old Chinese work, proving that 1500 years ago a preparation of hemp was employed medicinally in China, to annul the pain attendant upon cauterization and surgical operations. The wonderful power of endurance of the Hindu devotees appears to have been sometimes produced by the influence of this powerful drug. Some high Biblical commentators maintain that the gall and vinegar, or myrrhed wine, offered to our Saviour immediately before his crucifixion, was in all probability a preparation of hemp, and even speak of its earlier use.—(*Obstetric Works.*)

Pereira says the plant which grows in India, and has been described by some botanists under the name "*Cannabis Indica*," does not appear to possess any specific difference from the common hemp, and most other distinguished botanists have accordingly considered it identical with the *Cannabis Sativa* of Linnæus. He says he has carefully compared the *Cannabis Indica* that grows in the Chelsea Garden with the *Cannabis Sativa* in the Linnæan Collection, and cannot discover any essential distinction between them. The differences are evidently those of locality and cultivation, and cannot be considered as specific.

Dr. Dunglison says, the name of "Indian Hemp," so termed, has long been assigned in the United States to the *Apocynum Cannabinum*, and this has given rise in Europe, and occasionally in this country, to confusion in regard to the two articles, which are very distinct in their natural and medical characters; and that the use of *Cannabis Indica* is unknown in western Europe, and it is questionable whether the hemp of that region or of 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. This absence of the resinous secretion and consequent want of narcotic power is ascribed to difference of climate. Messrs. Smith, of Edinburgh, satisfied themselves that the resin contained in itself the whole properties of the plant. Mr. Donovan made numerous experiments with hemp cultivated by himself, and was satisfied that the domestic hemp is destitute of the principle which renders the Indian plant so desirable to the voluptuous people of the East. To the impurity of the hemp, or the want of resin in the extract sold for Indian hemp, may be attributed, in part, the diversity of opinion as to its operation and benefit in disease. An English author remarks that very little, if any, genuine hemp can be found in Europe. Cannot we say the same of our own country?

It appears that the cannabis has long been used, in various forms, as an intoxicating drug in many countries, and also as a remedy in many diseases. But it was reserved for Dr. O'Shaughnessy, in his various experiments upon himself and upon animals, to call the attention of the medical world to its more scientific use, and its adaptation to disease. He observes that the general effects on man were, usually, alleviation of pain, remarkable augmentation of the appetite, aphrodisia, and great mental cheerfulness. He was thus led to make use of it in many diseases, but more particularly in spasmodic affections. In tetanus, he directs three grains of the extract to be dissolved in one ounce of proof spirits, one drachm of which is to be given every half hour, until the patient be brought under its influence. For its beneficial effect upon this direful disease, he refers to fourteen cases, nine of which recovered.

Professor Miller, of Edinburgh, says, "my own experience speaks loudly in favor of the hemp in tetanus." He believes it valueless as an anodyne, as well as hypnotic, in ordinary circumstances, but thinks its virtues consist in a power of controlling inordinate muscular spasm. Dr. Duncan says he used the hemp in 1846, in the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, as a calmative and hypnotic. The object was in general attained, and no evil results followed. Hemp was given in other wards of the infirmary for a like purpose, and with like results. Mr. Donnovan was convinced of the beneficial effects of hemp, particularly in neuralgia, in his own case, as well as in that of others. Dr. Christison has administered hemp in many instances, and has observed that it produces sleep, and that its power over uterine contraction is very marked and powerful in many instances. Dr. Simpson stated that he had been induced to try hemp, in consequence of Dr. Churchill stating that it possessed powers similar to those of ergot of rye in arresting hæmorrhage from the uterus. In the few cases of labor in which he tried it, parturient action seemed to be very

marked and distinctly increased. Dr. Gregor gave the hemp in sixteen cases of labor, in seven of which it succeeded well. Dr. West says the hemp is extremely serviceable in controlling neuralgic pain, and recommends it, combined with camphor, in dysmenorrhœa and in flexions of the uterus, when there is excessive menstruation, in connection with pain. Its power in checking uterine hæmorrhage is favorably spoken of by many, and in some cases in which it would not do to give the ergot of rye.

On referring to authors, which I have taken the liberty to do, it appears that the hemp has been given in most diseases which arise from inordinate nervous action; and many, from experiments on themselves, on patients, and on animals, speak highly of its beneficial effects in the alleviation and cure of other diseases. Yet it requires further investigation to bring out its true properties, and its application to disease. I have used the Indian hemp for some time and in many diseases, especially in those connected with the womb, in neuralgic dysmenorrhœa, in menorrhagia, in cessation of menstruation where the red discharge alternates with uterine leucorrhœa of long continuance, in repeated attacks of uterine hæmorrhage, in all cases of nervous excitability, and in tedious labor, where there is restlessness of the patient, with ineffectual propulsive action of the uterus.

Dr. Meigs says, puerperal convulsion is a convulsion affecting a woman advanced in pregnancy or in labor. Dr. Churchill remarks, convulsions may attack pregnant women during any period of gestation, and after delivery. Dr. Braun, in his work on "Uræmic Eclampsia," says convulsions occur in every period of pregnancy as well as at other times. Authors generally attribute puerperal convulsions to some irritation caused by the uterus, coming on during gestation or after delivery. From these statements I was led to the use of hemp in puerperal convulsions, having also seen its beneficial effects in convulsions in general, after all the common remedies had been tried without relief. I made use of it in chorea, more particularly in that form connected with hysteria, or partaking of the character of both; in delirium tremens, both in the period of excitement and after the delirium subsides, and where long-continued watchfulness and great mental excitement continue; in mania, where there is watchfulness and excitement; in shaking palsy; in whooping cough, and all coughs of a spasmodic character. In phthisis, and other lung diseases, it may be given, especially where opium has ceased to procure sleep.

In the following letter will be found an example of its effects in a case of mania succeeding uterine hæmorrhage.

North New Salem, June 18, 1858.

DEAR SIR,—I regret that in consequence of sickness I have not been able to answer your letter before. As respects the history of the case of Mrs. F., I find, by referring to my day book, that I

was first called to visit her on the 15th of July, 1852. She was then at Fryeville, in the north part of Athol. She was expecting to be confined, and was taken with profuse uterine hæmorrhage. Dr. Colony was called, and when I arrived he had succeeded in checking the hæmorrhage by cold applications. She appeared pale, was exhausted from loss of blood, and manifested a disposition to rest. I found, on examination, the os uteri dilated sufficiently to admit the little finger, and that the placenta presented. At this moment Dr. C. was called in haste to attend another woman, and under these circumstances I thought best to give stimulants, and let her rest, that her vital energies might revive. In about an hour, as near as I can recollect, I was informed that she had had a pain, followed by an alarming hæmorrhage. Finding there was no time to be lost, I introduced my hand past the placenta, into the uterus, seized the child by the feet, and delivered it. It was a female, of ordinary size, but dead. The afterbirth followed, and by the use of a swathe and compress, cold applications, rest, &c., the hæmorrhage ceased, and in a few hours I left her quite comfortable. I called on the 17th, found her doing well, and dismissed her.

I was again called, July 28th, and found her with headache, and nervous excitement, which I thought were caused by her having taken cold, and permitting her milk to dry up too soon. I gave her a cathartic and some powders of camphor, nitre and valerian. I heard no more from her till August 2d, when I was called to visit her in the night, and found her delirious, crying "fire," "murder," &c. From this time, to August 19th, I saw her every second or third day, and used the ordinary remedies in such cases, with little if any mitigation of her symptoms. August 20th, she was moved from Fryeville to her father's, in Orange. I then saw her almost every day till August 27th, when you were called in consultation.

You undoubtedly recollect the peculiar restless condition in which you and Dr. C. found her at that time. She had actually worn the flesh from her elbows and hips by the constant rubbing of them together. She had gnawed her finger nails, and the ends of her fingers, till they bled. She refused to take anything which she suspected was medicine, or from any one whom she thought was a doctor. Her bowels were torpid. Under these circumstances, the hemp which you prescribed had a wonderful effect in quieting the nervous system, and the dose was so small that we succeeded in getting it down in her food. The torpid condition of the liver and bowels was removed by small doses of podophyllin, administered daily in the same manner as the hemp. The hemp was given in doses sufficient to keep her quiet. Some days one dose was sufficient; other days it would be necessary to repeat the dose once or twice. Under the above treatment, she

gradually improved, till September 12th, when she was dismissed permanently cured.

Yours truly,

Dr. Willis.

ROBERT ANDREWS.

It is a safe conclusion, from the many facts which have been published, that Indian hemp deserves further trial; in all cases making sure that the preparation used is good.

Royalston, Sept. 10, 1859.

I. P. WILLIS.
