

Two letters to Dr. Jones on the composition of the eau medicinale d'Husson / by James Moore.

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TWO LETTERS

TO DR. JONES,

ON THE

COMPOSITION

OF THE

EAU MEDICINALE D'HUSSON.

TWO LETTERS

TO DR. JOYCE

ESQ.

OF

THE MEDICAL ACADEMY

H. Bryer, Printer,
Bridge Street, Blackfriars, London.

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TWO LETTERS
TO DR. JONES
ON THE COMPOSITION
OF THE
EAU MEDICINALE D'HUSSON.

BY JAMES MOORE,

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS,
SURGEON TO THE SECOND REGIMENT OF LIFE GUARDS, AND
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL VACCINE ESTABLISHMENT.

Nothing ought to be made exclusive property, which
can be conveniently enjoyed in common.

Archdeacon Paley.

SECOND EDITION CORRECTED.

LONDON:

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ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

1811.

TWO LETTERS

TO THE JURY

ON THE CONFESSION

OF THE

MAN MEDICINALE D'UNION

BY JAMES MOORE

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LETTER I.

TO DR. JONES,

ON THE COMPOSITION

OF THE

EAU MEDICINALE

D'HUSSON.

*Conduit Street, June 8,
1811.*

DEAR SIR,

THE public are certainly much indebted to you for bringing into general notice L'Eau Medicinale d'Husson. Experience, to a considerable extent, has already proved that you by no means exaggerated the efficacy of that medicine in alleviating the pain, preventing or dissipating the

inflammation, and shortening, most remarkably, the duration of a paroxysm of gout.

For communicating such useful information, you could not expect to escape animadversion. Accordingly, some anonymous critics soon published a surmise that you were very cunningly vaunting a quack medicine from interested motives. This illiberal insinuation could not surely give you a moment's concern, as you are well aware that the base are ever prone to suspicion: while men of honor and intelligence placed full confidence in your work. Indeed it had hardly appeared, when physicians of the first eminence, relying implicitly upon your statement, recommended to their patients the Eau Medicinale, though its composition was unknown. And after witnessing its effects,

they now prescribe it regularly, and far more confidently, than most of the officinal compounds of the London Pharmacopœia.

The approbation of the distinguished part of the profession, and the gratification of freeing multitudes from anguish, will enable you to peruse the inuendos of detractors with scorn. I am well acquainted with your serious regrets that this medicine is a secret, and with your reiterated efforts to make it otherwise. And I remarked with pleasure your evident satisfaction on my intimating that probably the discovery of the composition was made, and your readiness to give me every assistance in your power to ascertain the truth. From which motives I am induced to explain to you the particulars of my researches on a subject which was first agitated by you in England.

It appears from your history of the Eau Medicinale, that however beneficial it may prove, Mr. Husson can acquire no fame by the discovery. The conduct of this French officer was as dishonourable as that of the other compounders of secret nostrums. Though ignorant of the peculiar virtue of the mixture he had accidentally jumbled together, yet he most impudently extolled it, as a remedy for almost every malady which can afflict the human body. Being solicitous for an increase of purchasers, and hardened against consequences, he neither circumscribed its use to any particular disease, nor even to any class of diseases; but, with a very few exceptions, recommended it to all who were sick: and not contented with its possessing the power of curing man-

kind, he vaunted its efficacy in * the epidemic diseases of animals, in the madness of dogs, and in the distempers of cattle. This recommendation to brutes did not lessen its consumption among rational beings. But we cannot doubt that this potent medicine, administered so indiscriminately, must have done great mischief; and, therefore, cannot be surprised, either at the clamor which was raised against it in France for its pernicious effects, or at its sale being prohibited at Paris by order of the police.

As this prohibition was supposed to originate with the faculty, it greatly augmented the reputation of the medicine,

* "Diverses experiences ont constaté l'efficacité de l'Eau Medicinale dans les epidémies, les Epizooties, et la Rage, et les autres maladies des bestiaux.—*Rccit. Historiq. de la Decouvert de l'Eau Medicin. Sc. page 24.*

which soon spread all over Germany. It at length reached Warsaw. Among the invalids who sought for relief by this bold means, some unhappy sufferers from the gout luckily made trial of it. The sudden benefit which they received equally astonished and delighted them. They of course recommended it to others afflicted with the same malady, who also risked the experiment, and were rewarded with the same relief.

Dr. Wolfe of that city, who knew the absurdity of any medicine being an universal specific, saw no impossibility in this being a remedy for the gout; his conduct on hearing the rumour of the above cases does him great credit. For he carefully sifted the facts, and when he had ascertained that the Eau Medicinale had an extraordinary influence over the gout,

he exhibited it to his patients, and published the result.

But this sensible physician, whose example you followed, exposed himself also to the censures of the strict adherents to old collegiate forms ; to those who like the physicians of Moliere think it decorous, that their patients should be permitted to suffer, or even to perish, rather than to relieve them by empiricism. More liberal doctrines are now in vogue among enlightened medical men. Besides which, patients with the gout sometimes protested against the infallibility of established physic, refused to suffer martyrdom in flannel ; and tempted with the hope of corporal salvation, swallowed the interdicted cup of Husson's wine.

Dr. Wolfe's work, does not, however, appear to have made near so great a sen-

sation in the continent, as your's has done in England. Yet, many learned physicians and chemists both of France and Germany, were so much convinced of the powers of this medicine, as to exert their skill in analysing it. All agreed, that it contained no metallic ingredient; and that it was composed of a vegetable infusion in wine. But this was no more than Husson had declared, and unfortunately the science of chemistry could go no farther; for it cannot discriminate the infinite number of infusions, which may be made from the vegetable kingdom.

Some, however, pretended that they had detected the individual plants of which this infusion was made. But you have pointed out, that they were mistaken; for upon an examination of the infusions of these plants, they were found to have no resem-

blance either in sensible qualities, or in medical effects to the Eau Medicinale. Your Essay has so much roused the attention of the medical profession in this country, that many have explored the depths of the chemical and botanical sciences to find out the secret. Plants, of the most uncommon and noxious species have been suspected. The fox glove, the wild cucumber, the purging flax, deleterious mushrooms, mosses, and the puff ball, (lycoperdon,) have all been examined; and many more are at this time under investigation.

You must be surprised that I should attempt a problem which has foiled so many of my superiors in knowledge. What encouraged me was the reflection that Mr. Husson was probably a man of very moderate acquirements. This led me to suspect that his medicine might be something

very obvious, which more learned men might miss by the profoundness of their researches.

My mode of investigating the subject was a very simple one.

The first time I opened one of Husson's bottles, I was struck with it's having a smell of opium, and when I tasted it I was confirmed in that belief. Several persons of whom I made enquiry were also of opinion that the Eau Medicinale contained some flavour of opium. When to this was conjoined the fact of its frequently relieving very acute pain and promoting sleep, I was led to suspect that opium formed part of the composition of the medicine.

The next point was to find out what other ingredients it contained; for it is evident, that there is at least one possessing qualities very different from those of opium. To

detect this, I turned in my thoughts the sensible operations of the medicine on the human body; especially this, that in the small dose of two drams, it often acts with considerable violence as an emetic and purgative, notwithstanding the opium which appears to be in the mixture. The vegetable productions which are known to possess such active powers are few in number; that which suggested itself most frequently to my mind was the root of the White Hellebore. This root, it appears by your work, had also been suspected by a French physician, but on examination was rejected. I was still not discouraged, because he seems to have believed that the medicine was a simple infusion, whereas I imagined, that it was a compound.

The White Hellebore, sometimes named *Veratrum*, was much employed by the ancient

Greek physicians. It was known to be a very violent emetic and purgative, and prescribed in desperate cases. It was particularly celebrated for the cure of madness; and the fame of Anticyra, where Hellebore abounds, is known to all.

Pliny describes it as a most powerful remedy, and enumerates a multitude of diseases which he asserts it cures. The following passage contains an extraordinary eulogium.*

“(Elleborum album) medetur ita morbis comitialibus, ut diximus, vertigini, melancholicis, insanientibus, lymphaticis, ele-

* (The White Hellebore) also cures epilepsy, as was already said; the vertigo, melancholy, madness, hydrophobia, the elephantiasis, the leprosy, the locked jaw, tremors, *the gout*, dropsy, the incipient tympanitis, stomach complaints, spasms of the face, the sciatica, quartan agues which resist other remedies, obstinate coughs, inflammations, and gripings which frequently recur.—*Plin. Nat. Hist. Book xxv. chap. v.*

phantiæ albæ, lepris, tetano, tremulis, *podagricis*, hydropticis, incipientibusque tympanicis, stomachicis, spasticis cynicis, ischiadicis, quartanis quæ aliter non desinant, tussi veteri, inflammationibus, torminibus redeuntibus."

There are several passages in Husson's work, which I think will convince you that he took the hint of his medicine from Pliny. In page 24, he observes,* "Plusieurs experiences prouvent que l'Eau Medicinale guerit l'epilepsie, la folie accidentelle et recente; elle modère et éloigne les accès de celles invetérées." This you see is nearly a translation of the beginning of the above Latin quotation.

* "Many experiments prove, that the Eau Medicinale cures the epilepsy, and accidental or recent attacks of madness: it calms and retards the paroxysms of inveterate madness."—*Recit. Historiq. Sc. de l'Eau Medic. page 24.*

And he writes in another place,* “ Un des effets les plus extraordinaires de ce remede est la guerison de la folie.”

It is hardly credible that Mr. Husson should fancy, that a newly discovered plant, whose properties, as he states, were unknown to the ancients and moderns, should possess the inconceivable power of curing madness: while it would be very natural for him to ascribe this virtue to Hellebore. And it is equally remarkable that, he asserts, in conformity with Pliny, that his medicine is efficacious in “ la rage,” or hydrophobia.

A scholar may, probably, call in question the correctness of my translating the “ lymphaticis” of Pliny, by the word hydropho-

* “ One of the most extraordinary effects of this remedy is its being a cure for madness.”—*Recit. Historiq. &c. de l'Eau Medic. &c. page 17.*

bia. But this doubt no way weakens the argument, as this signification is given in the French translation of that author; and lymphaticis is also explained in this sense by the jesuit Hardouin, in his notes to the edition of Pliny, in *usum Delphini*. These French editions are the books which certainly would be most likely to fall into the hands of Mr. Husson.

The above quoted passage from Pliny does not comprehend all the wonderful powers of the White Hellebore; he concludes by stating:* “*Eodem et Phthiriasis emendatur;*” which Husson translates freely by,† “*Elle a la même empire sur les maladies pediculaires.*” Thus, by copying Pliny, he bestows upon the Eau Medicinale a

* “The lousy disease is also cured by White Hellebore.”
—*Plin. Nat. Hist. Book xxv. chap. v.*

† “The Eau Medicinale has also a sovereign power over the diseases of lice.”

power of curing a disease of which there are few authenticated cases, since the death of Sylla. This you will allow to be tolerably decisive.

Next observe, in what diseases Hellebore, according to Pliny, is noxious; and the cases in which Husson cautions us against exhibiting his Eau Medicinale.

Pliny, among other warnings, writes, "Item* (vetant dari) timidis, aut si exulcerata sint præcordia, vel tumeant, minime sanguinem excreantibus, causariis vel latere, vel faucibus."

Husson's regard for his own interest induced him to abridge the exceptions, but he acknowledges that the "Eau Medi-

* "The White Hellebore must not be given to the timid, nor to those who have ulcerations, or swellings in the breast, and never to any who spit blood, or who are attacked in their side, or throat."

cinale n'est point propre aux pulmoniques*."

I shall not multiply quotations; but if you will compare Husson's book with Pliny on Hellebore, you will strongly incline to my opinion, that his encomium suggested Husson's invention. And you will also perceive why Mr. Husson was not at first aware of the particular power his medicine has upon the gout. For Pliny only mentions it as the tenth in the list of diseases which Hellebore cures. And as gout has generally been considered incurable, Mr. Husson would be cautious of noticing it very particularly.

All this, perhaps, forms a slight excuse for the conduct of Mr. Husson. An admiration of the ancients might induce him to

* "That the Eau Medicinale is improper in Pulmonic cases."

believe part of what Pliny wrote, and also some of the assertions which he himself published: for there is no art in which a man is so apt to be his own dupe as physic: and a portion of enthusiasm is frequently combined with knavery.

When considering the properties of the White Hellebore, I looked into several writers on the *Materia Medica*, who all assert that this plant is a virulent emetic and purgative. The authority even of the New Edinburgh Dispensary, on the qualities of a drug, has far more weight with many than that of Pliny, or the most distinguished of the Greek physicians. In describing the tincture of White Hellebore, it is there stated, "This tincture is sometimes used for acuating cathartics, &c. and as an emetic in apoplectic and maniacal disorders. It may likewise be so managed as to prove

a powerful alterative and deobstruent in cases where milder remedies have little effect. But a great deal of caution is requisite in its use: the dose at first ought to be only a few drops; if considerable, it proves violently emetic, or cathartic."

This description, and every other I could find, pointed out so remarkable an agreement in the sensible effects of the tincture of White Hellebore with those of the Eau Medicinale, that I determined to examine it accurately.

This medicine, though still in use, has been expunged from the Pharmacopœiæ, both of the London and Edinburgh Colleges of Physicians. The prudence of modern practice having substituted milder medicines for this powerful one: it is, however, still kept in the shops. On procuring a phial of the tincture made with spirits, I

perceived at once a striking agreement in taste with the Eau Medicinale.

I was then inclined to hope that I had discovered the medicine in substance, though not in form, and I determined to attempt the latter, by making a vinous infusion of Hellebore.

It is difficult to conceive what suggested the notion to Mr. Husson, who was not a physician, of tempering the violent infusion of White Hellebore with Opium. He could hardly have been aware of the effect that Opium would have in mitigating the emetic and cathartic action. So, perhaps, he only added it to assuage pain, a property of opium universally recognized. But whether this was his motive, or not, it was certainly a lucky thought.

As soon as the vinous infusion of White

Hellebore was filtered, I mixed some of it with tincture of Opium. I also dissolved crude Opium, and extract of Opium in some of the infusion, and filtered them and strained them in a variety of ways.

The taste and appearance could, I found, easily be given, but there was a peculiarity in the smell of the Eau Medicinale, which none of these mixtures had.

The root of the White Hellebore is almost inodorous; consequently the smell of any infusions of that root must depend upon the wine, or the ingredients with which it may be compounded.

It then occurred to me that Mr. Husson being a Frenchman, was likely to adopt some French form. For as no chemical analysis could detect his medicine, I still endeavoured to analyse his mind.

I therefore examined *Les Elemens de*

Pharmacie, par M. Baumé, Maitre Apothicaire de Paris, and there found that the Parisian Physicians had adopted Sydenham's prescription for their Laudanum: which is an infusion of crude Opium with saffron, cinnamon, and cloves, in Spanish white wine. I immediately procured a phial of Sydenham's Laudanum, and on mixing it with the wine of hellebore, I found that this mixture approached very near to the Eau Medicinale in colour, in taste, and even in smell; and when the mixture had stood for some time, there gradually formed the same cloudy deposit which is so remarkable in Husson's medicine.

As I could neither know, nor probably procure, the same wine employed by Husson, some little variety was to be expected from this circumstance. I was then led to examine, if medicines in general made ac-

curately from the same prescription, differed much in smell and taste. I got three phials of Sydenham's Laudanum made at three of the best shops in London, and I was astonished to find that their smell was very different. Yet, I have no doubt that all these medicines are extremely good, and well prepared.

If you make the trial, you will be surprised to find how much the odour of different parcels of the same medicine differ from each other. For the volatile particles are so fugitive, that the smell of many medicines, by keeping them a short time, changes considerably.

On finding this I perceived that it was quite impossible to expect that I should make a mixture which would precisely have the same smell of the Eau Medicinale. The superiority alone of English saffron

over French, would always occasion some difference, and as the spices and opium are also usually superior, and a different wine is necessarily employed, some difference, particularly in the smell, is inevitable.

But this is of no moment, and the information which you lately gave me that different specimens even of Husson's medicine vary considerably, is quite correct. For, although all of them agree in their medical properties; yet their smell taste and appearance, are in some degree different, owing unquestionably to the wine being changed. The French chemists declared that the Eau Medicinale, which they attempted to analyse, was formed of a Spanish wine: and the bottle which you first gave me was of that kind and had a sweetish taste.

But that which has been lately imported, effervesces when the cork is drawn, is a dry wine, and lighter in colour. It seems to be a thin kind of sparkling champaign procured near Sedan where the medicine is prepared. This substitution is probably owing to the commercial intercourse between France and Spain being at present interrupted.

Not being able to obtain the precise wine employed by Husson, I made my infusion of Malaga, only because it was a sweet Spanish wine. And when combined with the Laudanum of Sydenham, which is made usually with mountain wine, the mixture strikingly resembles the Eau Medicinale which was first imported. Indeed, the difference, seems to me not greater, than must necessarily occur, when a prescription is prepared with different wines, and in different countries.

With regard to the taste of the two, you

will find them very similar. Both have the same bitter flavour which remains for some time on the tongue. For the taste of substances depends upon a more fixt principle, than the smell.

The colour, and the turbid deposit which takes place on mixing the two transparent infusions, are so similar, as to render it highly probable that the form adopted by Husson is the same, or nearly the same, with mine. And if it is allowed that Opium and the White Hellebore root are the basis of the composition, a better mode of obtaining the virtues of these drugs ought to be employed. The light sparkling wines are uncertain in strength, and therefore quite improper for medical purposes.

With respect to the proportion of Laudanum there could be little difficulty, as the dose of the latter is well defined. Half a

bottle, that is one dram of the Eau Medicinale, frequently relieves acute pain. This could not be effected with less than twenty or thirty drops of Laudanum. And as in severe cases a whole bottle is requisite, this double quantity will contain a full dose of Laudanum.

In mixing the two infusions, round numbers would probably be employed, I therefore conceive that as each of Husson's bottles contain two drams, one fourth may be Laudanum. This quantity seems to correspond with the effect of relieving pain, and also with that of mitigating and retarding the evacuant powers of the White Hellebore.

Having fixed upon this proportion, the only thing that remained was to try if this mixture had the same efficacy on the gout as the Eau Medicinale.

To ascertain its safety I took a small dose one night. It made me sleep soundly and occasioned no inconvenience.

A case of acute gout then occurred to a person who was not in circumstances to purchase the Eau Medicinale. May 14th, the fit attacked the first joint of the great toe of his left foot, and the pain was very severe. On May 15th, I saw this patient, he was then in great pain, and the part affected was red and swollen. I directed him to take one dram of a mixture of three parts of the wine of White Hellebore, and one part of the Vinous Laudanum of Sydenham. This dose was exhibited at eight o'clock at night.

Soon after he took it he dropt asleep and did not waken for eight hours. He then found that the pain had lessened, and he had a loose evacuation early next morning, May 16th. In the course of this day the pain

declined, but another dram was given at bed time. This second dose composed him again completely, and he had two loose evacuations in the morning following, when the gout had disappeared, and nothing remained but a slight tenderness on walking.

May 19th, the gout appeared on the first joint of the great toe of *the right foot*. The pain was equally severe with the former attack on the left. One dram of the mixture was exhibited at night. May 20th, I found that the medicine had lessened the pain through the night, but had not removed it. He still complained of a good deal of pain in the right great toe, and some uneasiness on walking on the stones was even perceived in the toe originally affected. The dose had occasioned no sensible operation; I then directed two drams of the mixture to be taken at bed

time, conformably to the practice with the Eau Medicinale, when half a bottle does not operate.

After taking the two drams, the patient slept for above two hours, then wakened with uneasiness in his stomach; he at last vomited several times, and was purged once. On returning to bed he perspired, and found in the morning May 21st, that the gout had vanished from both feet.

His appearance was then rather dejected, he still complained of some uneasiness in his stomach, and his pulse, which previously had been quick, was now sunk to seventy-four in a minute.

This proved a complete crisis of the paroxysm; and you perceive that every occurrence in this case, exactly corresponded with the effects of Husson's Eau Medicinale.

I had a second opportunity of trying this mixture on a man who was attacked with gout in the joint of the knee, on the 25th, of May last.

I saw him May 27th, he was very lame, and suffering violently. On examining the knee, I found there was a large circular red blush, characteristic of the gout, to which the man was subject.

I directed for him one dram of the mixture at bed time.

May 28th, the patient had a good deal of pain through the night both in the knee and also in the leg: this morning, however, he is considerably relieved. The pain and redness have entirely left the knee, but he complains of some pain in his heel; and the skin over the tendo achillis appears a little swollen and red.

As one dram of the mixture had occa-

sioned no sensible operation, I directed him to take this night a dram and a half.

May 29th, my patient has slept well, and only complains of a little pain in the tendo achillis when he walks.

He felt a little squeamishness this morning, but has had no motion; I therefore directed him to take immediately a scruple of Rhubarb in an ounce of Peppermint water, and one dram of the mixture of the infusions of White Hellebore and Laudanum at night.

May 30th, I find that the Rhubarb did not operate yesterday, the gout medicine having occasioned constipation. He had not passed so good a night, but had suffered pains through the leg generally; there is, however, no appearance whatever of gout, for all swelling and redness are gone. I now directed one scruple of powdered Rhubarb, and two of Chrystals of Tartar to be taken

immediately and repeated if necessary. The first dose operated, and he was much relieved; nothing else was given, for two days, and he only felt some tenderness in walking.

June 1st. He now complained of wandering pains through the leg, I therefore directed for him a dose of a dram and a half of the Hellebore mixture.

June 2nd. He had passed an excellent night, all pain had disappeared, and he felt very well. The medicine produced no sensible operation, nor did it sink this patient's pulse; I therefore directed him to take another dose of the Rhubarb and Chrystals of Tartar, and he continued well ever since.

The mixture of the wine of White Hellebore and Laudanum was tried by a medical friend of mine on a woman who was attack-

ed with gout in the joint of the great toe on the 6th of May.

May 7th, the pain and tumefaction had increased, and one dram of the infusions was given at bed time.

May 8th, no perceptible effect was produced, and the medicine was repeated at night.

May 9th, the mixture occasioned during the night some perspiration, she slept a little, and the pain abated in the morning. As no considerable effect was produced by the medicine, two drams were exhibited at night.

May 10th, she has passed an excellent night; in the morning she vomited, soon after she was slightly purged, and the pain and swelling of the foot abated.

From this time all the symptoms gradually disappeared.

A fourth case was that of a strong fat man subject to gout, but not actually in a paroxysm. He complained of severe gouty pains through his feet, which kept him awake, and made him very uncomfortable.

Thirty drops of the mixture of the wine of White Hellebore and Laudanum were first given at bed time; then forty, and lastly sixty drops. The effects were to give him good nights, to prove laxative in the morning, and to abate the pains.

In these four cases, the effects of the mixed infusions were precisely the same with equal doses of the Eau Medicinale. In two of the cases where two drams were given, vomiting and purging were produced; and in one case the medicine occasioned constipation, which happens also

with the Eau Medicinale ; and the gout in all was relieved.

I think you must now either be persuaded that my mixture is the same with the Eau Medicinale d'Husson, or that there are two medicines which have the same properties. And it is not very material which is the case. But the reasons for believing them to be the same may be summed up thus.

First, I have shewn by internal evidence, that there is a very strong presumption that Mr. Husson borrowed the idea of his composition, from the praises bestowed on White Hellebore by the elder Pliny.

Secondly, that the mixture of the wine of White Hellebore and Laudanum, allowing for the composition being made in a different country and with a different

wine, agrees with the Eau Medicinale in colour.

Thirdly, that it differs but little in smell.

Fourthly, that it agrees in taste.

Fifthly, in dose, which is a very decisive circumstance.

Sixthly, in its usual evacuant powers on the stomach and bowels.

Seventhly, on its occasionally having no effect as an evacuant.

And Eighthly, on its giving great relief in the gout, and abridging the paroxysm.

The agreement in so many qualities, are strong arguments in favor of an identity of composition. Yet a greater number of cases are certainly requisite to prove it completely. A surgeon has few opportunities of this kind, but by disclosing my notions to you, and to the profes-

sion at large, every doubt will soon disappear. Perhaps I am too sanguine, but my impression is that the secret is discovered, and that a bottle of the Eau Medicinale d'Husson consists of a dram and a half of the wine of White Hellebore, mixed with half a dram of vinous Laudanum. You will hardly consider it an objection, that this prescription does not accord with Mr. Husson's declaration, "that the Eau Medicinale is the simple extract of a plant whose properties were before unknown." Whereas I consider it to be a compound infusion of medicines which have been handed down to us from antiquity, and which are now lying in every chemist's shop in Europe. It seems not improbable that Husson made that declaration to prevent a discovery; and it did, in fact, mislead you and many others, in-

ducing you to search for what is not to be found, an unknown plant possessing the various qualities of the Eau Medicinale.

But those who are capable of concealing from the public a secret, which they boast is inestimable, are not likely to be strict observers of truth. The quacks in England who obtain patents for their infallible medicines, have no scruples on that head. For the specifications which they solemnly aver to a Master in Chancery to contain their secret are always false. By which fraud they continue, in fact, the exclusive sale of their medicines long after their patent has expired.

The disclosure of the composition of the Eau Medicinale, if really effected, will, I trust, be very beneficial to the pub-

lic. For as long as a remedy is a secret, the benefit resulting from it must be very partial.

A full dose of the Eau Medicinale is sold for ten shillings, though its intrinsic value is hardly two pence. This high price puts the remedy out of the reach of many, who might therefore continue to be afflicted with all the tortures of gout, for want of the means of purchasing it: while others would be induced to impoverish themselves and their families, to purchase this expensive remedy as often as they had a fit of the gout.

And however active the proprietor may be, he could not furnish the quantity required. For the diffusion of the gout exceeds the exertions of avarice; and countries where the disease rages, might be deprived of its antidote.

The importation into this country, it must be owned, has been great, and it is spreading to the remotest counties. There is therefore little doubt that in a few years the medicine would be conveyed to every part of the British empire. One bottle, which contains only one full dose, was originally sold in France for twenty pence: when brought to England, it was at first retailed at six shillings, and has now risen to ten. But it only depends upon the proprietor's consideration of his own interest, whether he shall double or quadruple the price.

You will, probably, agree with me in thinking lightly of any commercial view of this subject; but it is no trivial matter to arm the medical profession with the means of controuling in a great degree the fury of the gout.

This malady chiefly afflicts the highest order of society, and those who are engaged in mental pursuits. It has ever been considered the opprobrium of physicians; who are usually reduced to the mortification of witnessing, rather than of alleviating, their patients' distress. They are rarely capable of preventing, or of even retarding, the perpetual recurrence of the attacks of the disease; for all their efforts are commonly fruitless, and they see their patients tormented from year to year, their limbs maimed, their strength melted, their spirits broken, and at last sink into the grave.

A hope now gleams upon us, that a remedy is at length disclosed for counteracting this intolerable malady. By knowing the composition, physicians can employ it with full effect. The arbitrary and unchangeable forms of empirical medicines

render them always unfit for general use : and the printed instructions which usually accompany them, are quite inadequate to enable unprofessional men to exhibit them. Thus, the directions for the use of Dr. James's powders, have been productive of much fatal practice.

The White Hellebore and Opium cannot be safely administered by any but those who have studied the science of medicine. Such persons can vary the dose, diminish or augment the proportion of Opium ; or combine with the principal ingredients, such substances as will accommodate them to the varying symptoms of the gout, to the age and sex of the patient, and to the innumerable peculiarities of the constitutions of men.

Were I to indulge in conjectures, I would express my expectations, that advantage

might also be derived from the root of the Black Hellebore. This has similar powers, and is far milder than the White. Pliny extols it in the following terms:* “Nigrum (Elleborum) medetur paralyticis, insanientibus, hydropicis, dum citra febrim, podagris veteribus, articulariis morbis. Trahit alvum, et bilem, pituitasque.” Although you may smile at this panegyric, you will not consider it impossible, that the weaker medicine may accord with certain delicate constitutions, better than the stronger. Whoever makes this, or any other medical improvement, let him not imitate Husson, and for private gain deprive mankind of what will soften their

* “The Black Hellebore root cures the palsy, madness, dropsy when without fever, gout of long standing, and diseases of the joints. It purges off bile and phlegm.”
—*Plin. Nat. Hist. Book xxv. chap. v.*

lot. Let him unfold at once all he knows, and follow the example of Jenner, whose name will be recorded for ever as one of the benefactors of the human race.

I remain, my dear SIR,

Your's, faithfully,

JAMES MOORE.

THE WINE OF THE WHITE HELLEBORE
ROOT.

Take of White Hellebore Root, eight ounces; Sherry two pints and a half. The root is to be cut into thin slices, and infused for a fortnight, occasionally shaking the bottle. Let the infusion be then filtered through paper.

The mixture employed for the gout consisted of three-parts of the above Wine of White Hellebore and one-part of Liquid Laudanum.

In a paroxysm of the gout, the dose of this mixture is from forty minims to two drams. During the intervals of paroxysms, from ten to twenty minims may be sometimes exhibited at bed time with advantage.

LETTER II.

Conduit Street, November 8th,
1811.

DEAR SIR,

ALTHOUGH I fear I am still unable to satisfy you completely on the subject of my former letter; yet I take the opportunity of a second edition, to write such additional information as is in my power.

I have had the opportunity of seeing the influence of the vinous infusions of White Hellebore and Opium, in a few more cases of gout. The results were precisely similar to those already

detailed, I shall therefore spare you the trouble of reading them. Indeed I have long observed that printed cases, even when attested by the most respectable signatures, avail little in establishing medical facts. On the present occasion, the truth will soon be made manifest, by less equivocal proofs: for the infusion of White Hellebore is compounded by many apothecaries and chemists, and has already been employed to some extent.

Those who have communicated with me have asserted that the mixed infusions of White Hellebore and Laudanum occasioned great relief in paroxysms of the gout, and acted in a similar manner to the Eau Medicinale d'Husson.

I had also the pleasure of being informed lately by a surgeon of my acquaintance, that his brother, a physician,

who resides in the country, and is severely afflicted with the gout, made trial of the above mixture upon himself. He was relieved of a severe paroxysm, and continues to take fifteen drops of the same medicine every night, to prevent a relapse.

The Profession, as far as I have heard, is pretty generally persuaded that I have really discovered the composition of the Eau Medicinale; so that most of those gentlemen who were exerting themselves to analyse it, have abandoned the pursuit. But it is probable that most patients who disregard expense, will continue to take the Eau Medicinale in preference, and wait till experience has indisputably determined the point at issue.

You are well acquainted with the vehement opposition which arose against

Husson's medicine at Paris, to which deleterious qualities were attributed. There are also several well attested instances in this country, of its producing dangerous and even fatal effects. This is inevitable in the employment of a potent empirical medicine: for the accompanying instructions are always vague, and commonly absurd; and the directions respecting the dose, are too undetermined for safe practice.

As the vinous infusion of white Hellebore is now coming into use, I feel it incumbent upon me to declare that I have no doubt of its being equally mischievous with the Eau Medicinale, if exhibited improperly. One case was communicated to me, where an over dose excited vomiting and purging to an alarming degree. Medicines endowed with such activity, ought

only to be administered by regular practitioners: who are competent to graduate the dose with the nicest precision. There is, luckily, no temptation to run risks, by administering large doses: for it is not by violent evacuations that this composition relieves the gout; but by a specific action on the nerves. The benefit is usually greatest, when it only excites perspiration; and is neither thrown up by vomiting, nor hurried out of the body by much purging. A large dose ought, therefore, never to be given, till it has been ascertained that smaller doses are ineffectual. The scientific Physician will certainly not be confined to any prescribed dose, or to any particular form: he will exhibit the infusion of the White Hellebore, like other medicines, in a variety of ways, sometimes adding, and sometimes

omitting laudanum; changing his prescription as the symptoms may indicate. And he will be induced to prescribe it more or less frequently in proportion to the advantages derived from it.

The reputation of medicines however, as well as of physicians, is peculiarly subject to ebb and flow, as if susceptible of lunar influence. The spring tide of the Eau Medicinale seems at present subsiding. For I have heard suspicions of its having sometimes failed, surmises of its having even done harm, and conclusions drawn, that there were constitutions and states of gout not fitted for this medicine. I call Esculapius to witness, that I heard these sagacious doubts thrown out, not by hypochondriacs or dabblers in physic, but by professional men. It might

have been expected now-a-days, that no one who had ever breathed the air of an anatomical theatre, need have informed another who had enjoyed the same happiness, that a medicine did not always succeed. No correspondent thinks of sending to our Medical Journals, a case where that admirable medicine the bark has failed of curing an ague. Nor does any one think it necessary to prove, that there are cases of acute inflammation in which bleeding is detrimental. Even the quack who invented the Eau Medicinale, although he has stuffed his book with absurdities, had not the preposterous folly to assert, that his composition was infallible. The Eau Medicinale is most certainly not capable of even palliating the sufferings of all; peculiar cases of gout will occur in which it is even injurious, and in the end those who are afflicted with gout must

submit to fate. But you have proved by uncontrovertible facts that there are cases of gout, and numerous ones, in which this medicine is extremely beneficial. So much so as to induce more sudden and complete relief from the agonies of a most severe and lasting disease, than is to be procured by any other medicine.

This is the substance of your work, and every day brings fresh proofs of the truths it contains. And in my former letter I endeavoured to shew that the essence of this extraordinary remedy was the White Hellebore root, or the Veratrum.

I now wish to have done with the Eau Medicinale, for I own I would it were extinct, on account of its empirical taint. It will, I trust, be succeeded by an unstained offspring, endowed with equal powers. The Hellebores are no upstart race, and

deserve to be restored to their pristine pharmaceutical rank. They are celebrated for their virtues by our earliest medical writers. To go no farther back than Aretæus who flourished about the reign of Trajan, you will find in his excellent work on chronic diseases, the following very remarkable passage. “ * To gouty persons Hellebore is the great remedy, especially in the first fits: but if the disease shall have existed for many years, or shall have been transmitted through ancestors, it accompanies the patient to his death.”

It thus appears that Aretæus was familiar with the use of Hellebore in the gout,

* Καὶ γὰρ καὶ τοῖσι ποδαγρικῶσι ἐλλίθερος τὸ μίγα ἄκος, ἀλλὰ ἐν τῆσι πρωτῆσι προσβολῆσι τοῦ πάθους· ἦν δὲ ἐκ πολλῶν μὲν ἤδη χρόνων ἔη, ἀτὰρ καὶ ἐκ διαδέξιος πατέρων φανῆ, ξυναποθνήσκει ἢ νοῦσος.

and knew perfectly its salutary operation. He was also much in the habit of administering it in many other diseases: and finishes his work with an exalted panegyric on this medicine. I shall only quote the concluding sentence.

* “ In all chronic diseases which are firmly rooted, if other medicines should fail, the White Hellebore is the only remedy; for it resembles fire in power, and will do more by its penetrating quality, than that will do by burning; it will convert difficulty into facility of breathing, paleness into bloom, and give flesh to the emaciated.”

* Ἀτὰρ καὶ πάντων τῶν χρονίων νούσων ἐς ῥίζαν ἰδρυμένων, ἦν ἀπαυδήση τὰ λοιπὰ ἄκεια, τόδε μόνον ἰητήριον. πυρὶ ἴκειλον γὰρ ἐς δύναμιν λευκὸς ἐλλίβορος, καὶ ὅ, τι περ περ πῦρ ἐργάζεται ἐκκαῖον, τοῦδε πλέον ἐλλίβορος εἰσω παρεκθίων πρήσσει, εὐπνοίαν μὲν ἐκ δυσπνοίας, ἐξ ἀχροΐης δὲ εὐχροΐην, καὶ ἀπὸ σκελετικής εὐσαρκίην.

Such encomiums from those who were once regarded as oracles in medicine, surely merit some attention. Aretæus ranks in the highest class of the ancient Greek physicians; many of whom are allowed to have possessed great intellectual endowments, and to have been close observers of nature. Their notion of the White Hellebore was not one of those fugitive ideas accidentally entertained by an enthusiast: but a fixed opinion which rather appears to have increased for seven or eight centuries. It continued till medicine along with the other sciences, was extinguished by the Goths.

But it is surprising, that since the revival of literature, although the Hellebores were brought into notice, they never have regained that reputation which they formerly possessed. For a considerable pe-

riod, Chemistry, or rather Alchemy was prosecuted with eagerness, many valuable remedies were thence discovered: and the invention of the compass led to the importation of a multitude of new drugs. The virtues of these substances were carefully investigated; they were calcined, sublimed, and precipitated; boiled, distilled, inspissated, and tortured in every possible way. The activity of merchants was excited to supply the demand, and ship loads of the most loathsome drugs were swallowed experimentally, while the neglected Hellebores withered before our eyes, and were trampled under our feet. This dereliction of a remedy, formerly so distinguished, is a very extraordinary fact. And the reason which is uniformly assigned by the moderns for rarely employing it is the violence of its action. Many of the

botanical writers express in the strongest terms their aversion to the White Hellebore in particular; and represent it as a poison unfit for the use of man. Whence this contradiction between the ancients and the moderns? The judicious Hoffman remarked this, and endeavoured to account for it. He observes, when treating on madness, “ Verum enim vero, ut ut Ve-
 “ teres Helleboro, elaterio reliquisque stre-
 “ nuissimis remediis perpetuo fere usi fu-
 “ erint, nos tamen mitiorum ob inopiam
 “ id factum fuisse existimamus. Dein vero
 “ simillimum est, eos ideo frequentius for-
 “ tiorum purgantium usum inivisse, quod
 “ tutissimas ipsorum præparaciones ut in-
 “ nuit Galenus *lib. de articulis*, compertas
 “ habuerunt. Sed illorum, proh dolor!
 “ monumenta temporis diuturnitate interi-
 “ erunt, ut pauca admodum remanserint,

“ de quo Hippocrates *de helleboro conscrip-*
 “ *tus liber* cujus initium tantum extat, satis
 “ testatur.”*

There is certainly no foundation for the above conjecture that the ancients knew better how to prepare Hellebore than the physicians in Hoffman's time. But luckily we now know, that the White Hellebore yields to wine all its medicinal properties. The weak sparkling wine employed in making the Eau Medicinale is an injudi-

* It is true, that the ancients made almost perpetual use of Hellebore, elaterium, and other very powerful remedies, which we imagine proceeded from the want of the milder medicines. Yet it is also very probable, that they used the stronger purgatives more frequently in consequence of having invented methods of preparing those medicines which rendered them very safe, as Galen gives a hint of *in his Book* on the Joints. But alas! So many records are lost that few remain. For of a work written by Hippocrates on Hellebore, only the beginning is extant.

Vide Hoffmanni Opera. Fol. Ed. De Delirio, Melancholico, et Maniaco. Tom. 3. Cap. 8. § xi.

cious selection. It renders the medicine uncertain in strength, and incapable of being preserved in a hot climate. A strong bodied wine such as Sherry should be adopted. As to the violent and even poisonous effects of the White Hellebore these can be no objection to employing it now ; for Physicians search for, and prescribe nothing but poisons. Poison and physic being almost synonymes. The only question is, whether the White Hellebore is that species of poison which can relieve persons labouring under disease.

The trials that have been already made in the gout seem to evince that the ancients rather underrated, than exaggerated its salutary powers. May we not then hope, that the very favourable estimation in which they held it in other diseases,

was not chimerical? May it not be useful in some of the various species of madness. A malady so deplorable, that nothing which has the slightest chance of alleviating it, ought to be neglected. The Epilepsy also is a distemper which is confessedly very rarely cured by modern practice; and this is one of those diseases for the cure of which the White Hellebore was highly prized by the ancients.

In cases which are despaired of, an experiment may be made; for if it fails, nothing is lost; while the energetic action of the White Hellebore on the human body gives us reason to expect that it will prove an efficacious remedy in these or in some other maladies. I therefore venture to predict that the vinous infusion

will soon find a place in the British Pharmacopœia.

I remain, dear SIR,

Yours sincerely,

JAMES MOORE.

H. Bryer, Printer,
Bridge Street, Blackfriars, London.