

The Ceylon moss : communications read to the Royal Medico Botanical Society, by Geo. G. Sigmond.

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COMMUNICATIONS READ BEFORE THE ROYAL MEDICO
BOTANICAL SOCIETY BY GEO. G. SIGMOND, M.D.,
F.L.S., &c. [Renshaw, 356, Strand.]

The brilliant discoveries of scientific men daily increase the wealth and the riches of our country, and demand from us a tribute of admiration and respect, not less do the observations of intelligent men, that lead to the diffusion of comfort and enjoyment amongst all classes of the community, deserve their share of gratitude and reward. Amongst the useful and valuable importations which have been lately made into this country is the Ceylon Moss, which was observed by Mr. Previté to be extensively used amongst the natives of Ceylon as a jelly. Struck with its good effects upon those who had employed it during a long series of years, he determined to ascertain its beneficial effects, and when thoroughly convinced of its utility, to introduce it into British India, where he was then resident. The analysis of the celebrated Dr. O. Shaughnessy and the experience of a number of the first medical men in Calcutta, confirmed him in his views of its powerful effects as a restorative upon the human frame. On his return to England he was anxious to have its powers still further investigated, and therefore placed the subject before the Royal Medico Botanical Society, where it was warmly taken up by Dr. Sigmond, whose labours in the examination of every vegetable substance upon health and upon disease have long been held in high estimation by the profession and by the public. Dr. Sigmond entered upon the consideration of all the points connected with this sea weed with much minuteness, and after an elaborate investigation of the powers and effects which it produced, furnished the society with the results of which the volume before us contains the matter most important to the public. It is dedicated to the highly gifted president Earl Stanhope, in a manner that cannot but be agreeable to one who has taken such a warm interest in the study of medical botany. Dr. Sigmond observes—

“The subject with which I have ventured to associate your lordship's name is the introduction of a new remedial agent, which I hope will be deemed of sufficient interest and importance to warrant the use of a name, never pronounced but with blessings by the poor, and with expressions of respect by the good.”

Dr. Sigmond, in his preface, thus explains the manner in which the Ceylon Moss was introduced to his notice:—

“The attention of Mr. Previté, during a residence in the island of Ceylon, was accidentally directed to the uses made by the natives of a moss found on the sea shore. He found that it was extensively employed in the arts and for culinary purposes; he was led to a minute examination of its properties, and upon observing how nutritious were its powers, he determined to place it in the hands of some of the most eminent of the faculty in Calcutta, by whom it was introduced into practice, and where, for upwards of fifteen years, it obtained the sanction of all those who had become familiar with its uses. Mr. Previté submitted to my examination in the year 1837 a specimen of Ceylon Moss, which he had just imported into this country, and for which he requested the attention of the Royal Medico-Botanical Society. He placed in my hands the certificates of several most distinguished medical men residing at Calcutta, which spoke warmly in favour of the medicinal and dietetic properties of jelly, and of preparations formed from it. He likewise pointed out to me the analysis which had been made by Dr. O'Shaughnessy, a physician of high and deserved reputation, and professor of chemistry to the College of Calcutta. I recommended Mr. Previté to lay these documents, with his mode of preparation, before the society in the form of a letter, to be read at one of its meetings. In compliance with the wish I expressed, he drew up a paper, which was read June 28th, it excited considerable interest. It was directed by the council of the society that these documents should be printed in the forthcoming number of the transactions, in order to draw the attention of the medical profession to the discovery of this important addition to our therapeutic agents.”

He then proceeds to lay before the society his own remarks on the uses of sea weeds:—

"The infinite variety of sea weeds must afford sources of different medicinal and dietetic agency, and that they are deeply prized amongst the eastern nations is fully proved from the experience of travellers; and in proof of the high estimation in which they are held amongst the Asiatic nations, on whose shores the subject of my observations so much abounds, the following extract from the voyage of the observant and highly-gifted traveller, Barrow, satisfactorily proves:—'All the gelatinous substances derived from the sea, whether animal or vegetable, are considered by the Cochia Chinese amongst the most nutritious of all aliments, and, on this principle, various kinds of algæ or sea weeds, particularly those genera which are known by the name of fuci and alizæ, are included in the list of these edible plants. In the populous islands of Japan, the natives of the sea coast derive part of their sustenance from various kinds of sea weeds, and from none more than that species of fucus which is called saccarinus. It would appear from Thunberg's account of its leaves being used to ornament and embellish packages of fruit, or other presents offered to strangers, that this plant is in high estimation.'

"Not only in their ordinary form, or acted upon by the culinary art, are the mosses employed as food; but one of the most admired luxuries of the table in China is the eatable bird's nest formed from them. After undergoing many washings and preparations, they are made into a soft, delicious jelly; they are likewise served up in broths and soups; they have the reputation of being nutritious, and gently stimulating. The extravagant prices given for these nests by the Chinese render them a most expensive article of diet.

Of the medicinal value of the Ceylon Moss we learn from the following remarks:—

"The Ceylon moss abounds in that gelatinous or amylaceous principle which forms the useful ingredient of the Iceland moss, and is perfectly free from the bitter and mischievous ingredient; it must, therefore, supply most advantageously the place of the latter article, where it was formerly recommended, and where it was not only found ineffectual, but occasionally injurious. Its efficacy at the commencement of pulmonic disease, and its power of alleviation of the worst symptoms, and of supporting the constitution under the action of more decided remedies, are the claims that we can urge for its employment, without pretension to an agency which it does not possess.

"It is at that stage of the insidious commencement of a disease, whose gradual inroads overthrow the constitution, and whose fatal advance is at first often unseen, that this remedial agent is most serviceable. When there is a disposition to cough—when there is an almost imperceptible increase in the frequency of respiration upon exercise, when the digestive functions are disordered, the stomach often nauseated or fastidious, the bowels constipated, the secretions altered in colour and consistency, there is a necessity for watchfulness. Without being over-anxious, without too much tampering, there should be great carefulness as to diet, to clothing, and to exposure to heat or to cold. There is a period at which youth first commences to bloom, and to be fitted for the important duties of life at which the maxims of health cannot be too sedulously enforced. In such instances the Ceylon Moss affords the most important relief, and effects a cure. It allays the irritation of the mucous surface by its demulcent power, it affords a nutriment to the system, perfectly devoid of stimulus, and it strengthens and gives tone to the digestive organs. Its demulcent powers may be developed by forming it into troches or lozenges which, slowly dissolved in the mouth, lubricate the mucous surface, and allay the excitement which produces the convulsive effort of coughing. When the windpipe and its branches have been irritated, and this irritation is oftentimes a source of ulceration, and of complication with pulmonic disease, the moss, in such a form, is most valuable. Tubercles advance to their worst state of suppuration, from slight causes, and they may be arrested before they reach the fatal point by the moss—a remedy simple and mild. Asthma, during the intervals of paroxysm, will be alleviated by means which not only assist in the production of an increased quantity of mucous, but also in restoring health to the digestive organs, which are so generally impaired, and are so often the exciting cause of each attack.

"There is a symptom which occurs not only in common catarrh, in acute bronchitis, or in thoracic disease, but is likewise to be observed in plethoric persons, more particularly females, as they advance in life; it is a peculiar tickling sensation, described as occurring in the windpipe, which causes a cough, sometimes of a very harrassing nature. It frequently comes on the first thing in the morning, as soon as the individual lifts himself from the recumbent position, or begins to move about; sometimes it follows upon laying down or changing side; this cough lasts for some length of time, and ceases after some degree of expectoration. This sensation of tickling, or of itching, is constantly referred to the situation of the bifurcation of the trachea, or that portion of the windpipe immediately above it; it seems dependant on slight causes generally, although there may be circumstances where it occurs with

great severity, which give rise to it, such as elongations of the uvula, or the existence of suppurating cavities communicating with either bronchus. This sensation is oftentimes most difficult to relieve; sometimes an increased flow of mucus produces it, at other times it causes its cessation. The Ceylon Moss, allowed slowly to dissolve, in the form of a lozenge, or a spoonful of the jelly, will prove highly serviceable."

To the public speaker the following remarks are of the greatest value:—"Those who are called upon to exert their voices in public are liable to a peculiar sensation about the windpipe, attended with the excretion of a viscid mucus. It is found sometimes a matter of considerable difficulty to allay this irritation—gargles of different descriptions, some containing acids, others astringents; lozenges formed of cayenne, of horehound, of marshmallows, of nitrate of potash, have been tried, whilst some have submitted to the application to the fauces of caustic, and of solutions of sugar of lead, without deriving the slightest advantage. In such cases a composition of the Ceylon Moss, and of proper substances, in due proportion, formed into a lozenge, affords a most material assistance when occasionally taken. The best period, however, for using such lozenges, is on retiring to rest. The following morning it will be found that the uneasy sensation, which those who are accustomed to public speaking can only fully understand, for it is almost impossible to explain the peculiarity, will be either diminished, or it will have ceased altogether."

The remarks upon the food requisite for the mother during the period she is *enceinte*, and the infant during lactation, deserve attentive perusal:—Much of the future happiness of the being just brought into the world is dependent upon the quantity and quality of the food upon which the parent lives as well during the period she is *enceinte* as during that of lactation. The ancients were strongly impressed with the idea that the mental qualities, as well as the corporeal powers, were thus influenced. They attributed the drunken habits of Claudius Tiberius Nero to the infirmity under which his nurse laboured, of drinking; and the epithet they gave him, *Calidus Biberius Mero*, was obtained through his misfortune in having a drunken woman as his foster parent; the bloodthirstiness of Tiberius was ascribed to a somewhat similar cause. Certain, however, is it that the helpless babe suffers from the errors of diet of its nurse. The simpler the food the more nutritious, and the more easily digested the better; and none can be more safely taken than the Ceylon Moss. It is infinitely to be preferred to any of the bitter tonics, or austere acids, which not only may produce infantile convulsions, but occasionally death. The want of precaution upon the part of the nurse, and even the injudicious employment of medicines, has proved destructive; alarming symptoms and death have occurred in consequence of the milk becoming impregnated with sulphuric acid, which is too often given, with infusion of roses and with sulphate of quinine as a restorative to women after lying in, or with the idea of promoting the flow of milk by using tonics. Small as the dose may seem, yet even four drops of diluted sulphuric acid, given to the nurse two or three times a day, have produced disordered bowels in the infant, attended with frequent green motions, restlessness, and eventual death. The bitterness of bark or porter, and of aromatic confection, likewise affects the child, and there is scarcely an increased state of sensibility in the tender being that may not be ascribed to some error of the nurse's diet. The poison that a mother has taken in the last moment of her delivery, to terminate her own existence, has been detected in the child. During the period that a female is *enceinte* the jelly, the blanc-mange, the milk formed with the Ceylon Moss, will prove a most important article of diet; in the earlier stages, when the stomach sympathises with the new state of the system, one or all of these articles of food will remain when everything else is ejected, and must therefore be prized.

The great advantages which have been so judiciously pointed out are obtained, it would appear, with the greatest facility. There requires neither time, apparatus, nor any art of cookery to prepare for immediate use whatever quantity of the jelly to be obtained from the moss which circumstances may demand. This is a matter of no small moment in the sick room, the directions given by Mr. Previte are simple and easily understood. They are given us in the volume before us, and we conclude our observations on this curious and interesting subject with the following extracts:—

"One of the recommendations of the moss of Ceylon is the facility and the quickness with which it may be prepared for use. It demands no culinary skill, nor is much time occupied in giving it the form which is required. The directions which have been laid down by Mr. Previte, and which are the result of much experience and attention, are exceedingly simple, and are perfectly intelligible to every nurse or domestic in attendance upon the sick. The jelly which it furnishes may be ready in a short time after a wish is expressed, no unusual apparatus is required, but in any room in which there is a fire it may be obtained, so that there is no difficulty, at all hours of the night, in supplying the wants of the invalid. I have had occasion to learn that it has remained upon the most irritable stomachs, where every thing has been rejected—has proved quite sufficient to allay retching when it has been most distressing, and has given more immediate relief than any other means have afforded, in the distressing sickness attendant upon the earlier stages of pregnancy. It will afford an invaluable assistance in that state of constant retching, attendant upon disordered states of the liver; where calculi are imbedded in the narrow biliary ducts, it will prove most serviceable; for when almost any substance will excite retching, if internally taken, this will remain, from its being so easily converted into chyle, and so rapidly imbibed by the stomach. It produces none of that sensation of thirst which is so often complained of as following upon the other nutritious substances, and which is so apt to occur within an hour or two after their employment; no flatulence, no heartburn, no acidity follow upon its use.

Amongst the peculiar advantages of the Ceylon moss jelly is the rapidity with which coagulation takes place, its durability, and its delicate and nutritious qualities. The fluid gelatinizes within ten minutes after boiling, long before it becomes cold. In this state it will remain unaltered for many days, even in the hottest weather; a circumstance which gives it a great advantage over every form of animal jelly.

The jelly is agreeable to the palate, is delicate, and marked neither by taste nor smell, so that at the most fastidious moment of ca- rice it cannot be considered objectionable; it is quickly soluble in the mouth, and sits lightly on the stomach; it may be flavoured according to the wish of the invalid, in the manner directed by Mr. Previte.

One of the simplest, most useful, and most nourishing forms in which it can be conveyed, is combined with milk, and the following observation made by Mr. Previte, is of more importance even than those he has made upon jel-

lins and ~~bliss~~ ~~me~~
The most useful is milk or whey, and simple sweetened white-bread, and
strains; these are very nourishing and strengthening articles for children, and
for all delicate constitutions, especially if taken in the morning.