

Origin & nature of tobacco / by George Trask.

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ORIGIN & NATURE OF TOBACCO.

BY THE REV. GEORGE TRASK.

TOBACCO, as far as Europeans are concerned, is comparatively of recent discovery and use. Confined for nearly five thousand six hundred years to Central America and some parts of the West Indies, it is wonderful that in less than three centuries it has spread all over the world.

Centuries ago, according to tradition, Indians on this continent worshipped devils; Indian priests got drunk on tobacco-smoke, and in this state they held communions with their deities, and when the fit of intoxication had passed they would make known to the savages about them the responses of their deities—the responses of devils.

In 1492, as Columbus lay with his ships side by side at the Island of Cuba, he sent two men, a *Caleb* and *Joshua*, to search the land, and report what they might see. On their return, among other things, they said they saw "*the naked savages twist large leaves together, light one end at the fire, and smoke like devils!*" Smokers should bear in mind their pedigree!

One author, Mellen, says that the plant was found in the province of Yucatan, in the Mexican Gulf, in a very flourishing state. "Among the natives, who held it in the greatest possible esteem and reverence, from the almost magical virtues they attached to it, it was called *Petum*, and by those in the adjoining islands, *Yoli*. So singular a production of the country could but draw the attention of the Spanish commander to it. The consequence was that a specimen of it was shipped with other curiosities of the country, with a long detail of its supposed astonishing virtues in pharmacy. In the latter end of the year the plants arrived at their destination; and this may fairly be deemed to have been their first entrance into the civilized portions of the world."

From Spain, tobacco soon found its way to different parts of the civilized world,—first to Portugal, and then to the other European kingdoms. From Spain and Portugal, it was brought by one of the French ambassadors to Paris. Here it is supposed the practice of snuff-taking first commenced. The same woman, Catherine de Medicis, who was notorious for her instigation of the Massacre of the Protestants on St. Bartholomew's day, may be considered the first Snuff-taker, She it is said, used tobacco in the form of powder; and the practice has certainly been well kept up in that city ever since. From the fact of this queen having used tobacco, it got the beautiful names of *Herba Catharinæ Medicæ* and *Herba Reginæ*, or the Queen's Herb.

About this time tobacco came under the patronage of Cardinal Sancta Croce, the Pope's nuncio, who in returning from his embassy to

the Spanish and Portuguese courts, carried the plant to his own country.

As in other countries, tobacco was received with general favor in England, although here as elsewhere it found bitter opponents. It is generally supposed to have been introduced first by Sir Walter Raleigh, in 1548, or as some say, in 1586. Others, however, regard it more probable that to Sir Walter is only due the honor of having been the first patron of the precious weed, and that it was first introduced into England by Ralph Lane, who returned to that country with Sir Francis Drake in 1560. The earliest evidences of Sir Walter Raleigh's using it seems to have been that of 1584. According to Lobelius, it was cultivated in England in 1570. Clucins says that "the English, on their return from Virginia, brought tobacco-pipes made of clay; and, since that time, the use of drinking tobacco hath so much prevailed all over England, especially among the courtiers, that they have caused many such pipes made to drink tobacco with."

Whatever may be true on the subject, Sir Walter Raleigh appears to have the credit of having introduced an article which has been the source of great National evil! Those who have observed the practice of smoking descend from Father to Son cannot fail to have discovered that it has completely changed the character of England's youths and young men!—Ed.

THE NATURE OF TOBACCO.

What is tobacco? "It is," says the *Encyclopedia Americana*, "a nauseous and poisonous weed, of an acrid taste and disagreeable odour, in short, whose only properties are deleterious." Dr. Bigelow in his *American Medical Botany*, says, "In its external and sensible properties there is no plant which has less to recommend it than the common tobacco. A small quantity taken into the stomach excites violent vomiting, attended with other alarming symptoms."

In an elaborate chemical analysis of tobacco, published by Van Vauquelin in the *Annales de Chimie*, we have the following results:—"The broad-leaved tobacco furnishes from its juice the following constituents. 1. A large quantity of animal matter of an albuminous nature. 2. Malate of lime with an excess of acid. 3. Acetic acid. 4. Nitrate and muriate of potash in observable quantities. 5. A red matter, soluble in alcohol and water, which swells and boils in the fire, its nature undetermined. 6. Muriate Ammonia. 7. A peculiar acrid, volatile, colorless, substance, soluble in water and alcohol, and which appears different from anything known in the vegetable kingdom. It is this principle which gives to it, prepared, its peculiar character, and it is, perhaps, not to be found in any other species of plant. Its medical activity is supposed to reside in this volatile portion, which is the essential oil." A more recent analysis we take from Boussingault. "The virtues of tobacco very probably reside in the volatile vegetable alkali, nicotine, which it contains." The analysis of M. Posselt and Kieman show the leaf of tobacco to be composed as follows: Nicotine 0.07; extractive matter 2.87; gum 1.74; a green resin 0.27; albumen 0.26; gluten 1.05; malic acid 0.51; malate of ammonia 0.12; sulphate of potash 0.05; chloride of potassium 0.06; nitrate and malate of



potash 0.21 ; phosphate of lime 0.17 ; malate of lime 0.72 ; silica 0.09 ; woody matter 4.97 ; and water 86.84=100.00. During the fermentation of the leaves there is always a formation of ammoniacal salts.

Kœmpfer ranks tobacco with strong vegetable poisons. A thread dipped in the oil of tobacco, and drawn through a wound made by a needle in an animal, killed it in the space of seven minutes. Sir B. Brodie found that two drops of the oil applied to the tongue of a cat, with an interval of fifteen minutes, occasioned death. A single drop suspended in an ounce of water, and injected into the rectum of a cat produced death in about five minutes. One drop suspended in an ounce and a half of mucilage, and thrown into the rectum of a dog, produced violent symptoms, and a repetition of the experiment killed him. How, then, can any man habitually use so noxious a plant without realizing the most serious consequences to his health and constitution ?

Let us now glance at its *medicinal qualities*. It is a most powerful *narcotic, emetic, cathartic and diuretic*. Its effects as a medicine upon the system are severe nausea, vomiting, cold sweats, universal tremors, and extreme debility. "Even the physician," says Dr. Alcott, "some of whose medicines are so active that a few grains will destroy life, at once finds tobacco too powerful for his use ; and, in those cases where it is most clearly required, only makes it a last resort." As an emetic, it is said to exceed all others in its promptness, violence, and permanence of impression. In some instances it has been used with success in expelling other poisons from the stomach, on account of the promptness and violence with which it acts. It can be applied as well externally, in the form of a poultice to the stomach, as internally, and with the same effect. A surgeon in the United States army says that the soldiers had an expedient to exempt themselves from duty by wearing a piece of tobacco until the most alarming symptoms of illness appeared in the whole system.

Tobacco is, in fact, a violent, absolute poison. A very moderate quantity introduced into the system,—even applying the moistened leaves over the stomach,—has been known very suddenly to extinguish life.

The fact that it is a powerful article of the *Materia Medica*, and so powerful that the best physicians use it only in extreme cases as a *dernier resort*, and that then in many instances, it proves fatal, abundantly evidences that it never ought to be used as a luxury, by men in health. No man in his sober senses would think that because calomel has been successfully used as a medicine, therefore a person might be benefited by taking it daily when in health. Indeed, ninety-nine hundredths of those who constantly use tobacco would not risk the consequence of a daily use of opium ; and yet the habitual use of tobacco is instrumental in shortening many more lives, and, when fairly introduced into the system, proves equally as virulent a poison. The oil of tobacco approaches nearer than any other to that most deadly of all poisons—prussic acid. The only reason that every quid and cigar does not produce complete prostration or death is that nature puts forth her best efforts to resist its influence, as, if mad at the offence given her, either spits it out, or otherwise ejects it from the system. But the constant application of it from year to year will, in the course of time, so wear out her energies, that she will sink under the reiterated assaults.

"Tobacco," says the compiler of a Cyclopaedia, "contains an oil of a poisonous quality, which is used in some countries to destroy snakes, by putting a little on the tongue. On receiving it, the snake is seized with convulsions, coils itself up and dies, and, what is very singular, becomes almost as stiff and hard as if it were dried in the sun." Many insects die instantly by having tobacco-smoke blown upon them.

Beck, in his *Materia Medica*, says, "The essential oil, obtained from tobacco by distillation, is very highly narcotic, so that when introduced into a wound, or injected into the rectum, it occasions instant death." He further remarks, as a singularity in relation to the operation of narcotics, that "the infusion of tobacco not only affects the nervous system, but acts powerfully on the heart, causing its contractions to cease, while the essential oil has no effect." The testimony of the celebrated Cullen, in his *Materia Medica*, and of Darwin, in his *Zoonomia*, corresponds with that of every other Medical writer of eminence, in relation to the poisonous quality, and the deleterious and often fatal influence of the common use of tobacco.

Burton, a popular author, in his work entitled "The Anatomy of Melancholy," says: "Tobacco, divine, rare, superexcellent tobacco, which goes far beyond all their panaceas, potable gold, and philosopher's stones, a sovereign remedy to all diseases. A good vomit, confess—a virtuous herb, if it be well qualified, opportunely taken, and medicinally used; but as it is commonly abused by most men, which take it as tinkers do ale, 'tis a plague, a mischief, a violent purger of goods, lands, health; hellish, devilish, and damned tobacco, the ruin of body and soul,"

Now supposing a chemical analysis should show strawberries possess as deleterious properties, and medicinal qualities as powerful, and that physicians with united voice proclaimed them a poison always injurious, and often fatal, who could be persuaded to put them on his table as an article of luxury? What parent would suffer his child to eat them? Laws would be enacted at once, prohibiting the sale of them under severe penalties. Why, then, is tobacco so generally used, and why are so few efforts made to save the world from its deadly influence? Why? Because of its intoxicating property; the appetite and habit is so strong that the grave must open, to make a man throw away his quid or his pipe. Men are held captive by it in the same way that they are held captive by alcohol. It does not so generally, it is true, make men stagger like alcohol, but it as really blinds and deceives. Few of those who use alcohol apprehend any injurious results. And just so it is with those who use tobacco. Some of both classes have at times awful convictions that its use is injurious, and will bring them, through a wilderness of woes, prematurely to the grave; but the cup in the one case, and the pipe or quid in the others, lulls their fears!

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