

CINERARIA MARITIMA IN THE TREATMENT OF CATARACT.

COMMUNICATED BY W. T. THISELTON DYER,

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Mr. J. H. Hart, F.L.S., Superintendent of the Botanic Gardens, Trinidad, has forwarded to us the very interesting letter, of which I enclose a copy. The facts stated in it are probably not unknown in therapeutics. But I do not myself remember to have seen any reference to them in print. The narrative seems to me to bear so many intrinsic marks of accuracy that I think it is worth reproducing in the pages of the *Pharmaceutical Journal*.

"21, Maraval Road,

"Port of Spain,

"April 13, 1888.

"Dear Sir,—In the year 1868, whilst holding the Government office of Resident Medical Officer of the Colonial Hospital here, I first observed during a surgical operation some little difficulty in taking up an artery, and soon discovered that it was due to incipient cataract, which subsequently declared itself to be of the "soft lenticular" character, and its progress was slow, steady and gradual in both eyes until 1874, when I visited Europe with the object of consulting continental and London oculists on my case. With a like view I again proceeded to England in 1878, and finally in 1882, when I placed myself under the care of Mr. Henry Power, F.R.S., of Great Cumberland Street, who operated on my left eye (that being the better of the two) unsuccessfully. I now returned to the colony with little or no vision in the right eye, the non-operated one, and with a relinquishment of all practice imposed on me by blindness, and from that period until February last I had to be led or conducted wherever I might go. About the beginning of the month stated, while on a visit to friends who had resided for some years in Venezuela, I was asked by them and strongly urged to try the curative effect of a plant called *Cineraria maritima*, the efficacy of which in removing cataractal blindness was greatly extolled; and they related cases in illustration of its juice possessing specific powers of destroying and absorbing the abnormal conditions of the eye. As I was then totally blind, with nothing to lose, and with more incredulity than hope in the experiment, my friends procured the juice for me, when I commenced its use on the 7th of the same month, in two drop doses in each eye three times a day, and, *mirabile dictu*, on the fourth day (February 11) I observed a faint glimmer of light to pervade the right eye. The treatment was steadily persevered with, now hopefully, I must admit, and I continued to experience new and fresh evidences of the favourable action of this potent agent; to be brief, I can now discern figures and even faces under a favourable light, with objects of furniture throughout the apartments, and can even distinguish the hands and tell the hour on a white dialled watch with my right eye.

"Now for the operated one. The improvement here commenced in the fourth week of treatment by a gradual dispersion of what always appeared to me a curtain of the blackest darkness hanging over and covering two-thirds of the orbit; with this there was always great weight, pressure and occasional pain throughout the

organ; but all this has now disappeared by a steadily increasing flood of light and unmistakable vision, so that I can discern my hand and the separation of my fingers when held up before it. All this the result of little more than two months treatment. Can it be? And yet the incontrovertible fact is before me that a simple unpretending little plant should outrival and bid surely to accomplish what skill and art had failed to do.

"In its application to the eye it produces no irritability or inflammatory action whatever, beyond a slight burning sense of pain which lasts only a couple of minutes, accompanied or followed by a profuse lachrymal discharge tinged with the colouring matter of the liquid used, whilst its therapeutic properties are solvent, stimulating and absorbent.

"From the scarcity of the *Cineraria* in this colony, of which I believe there are only three plants husbanded with sacred care, on which I am dependent for my supply, I am compelled to solicit your kind help with a view of procuring for me a few plants or its seed to propagate a stock on which I may hope to rely for the ultimate completion of a blessing which ranks only second to life itself.

"I am, etc.,

"R. MERCER, M.D.

"P.S.—If it be practicable might I beg of you to procure for me three or four ounces of the juice put up in half ounce phials, but without alcoholic or other preservative agent. Leaves of matured growth are to be preferred to younger ones, as the liquid is found to be more active and useful."

COCATANNIC ACID, FROM THE LEAVES OF ERYTHROXYLON COCA GROWN IN INDIA.

BY C. J. H. WARDEN.

During a recent investigation of the leaves of the *Erythroxylon Coca* grown in India, I noticed that in employing Squibb's process for the extraction of cocaine a yellow deposit was frequently adherent to the sides of the bottle in which the acidified alcoholic extract was agitated with ether. On examination this yellow deposit proved to be cocatannic acid. As the cocatannic acid obtained from Indian grown coca leaves appears to differ somewhat in its physical properties from the cocatannin as originally described, I venture to submit the following note of the physical and chemical properties of the principle.

Cocatannin appears to have been first observed by Wackenroder* and Gaedeke.† Niemann in 1860 at Göttingen published a dissertation, "Über eine Base in den Cocablättern." These authors Gmelin refers to in his 'Handbook of Chemistry,' and gives the following account of the preparation and properties of the acid. No mention, however, of the ultimate composition of the principle is afforded. According to Gmelin, when coca leaves are exhausted with alcohol containing sulphuric acid, for the preparation of cocaine, the tincture digested with hydrate of lime and filtered, the filtrate neutralized with sulphuric acid, and the alcohol distilled off, carbonate of soda throws down the cocaine, which may be removed by shaking up the alcoholic solution with ether, the cocatannic acid then remaining

* *Archiv der Pharm.*, lxxv., 26.

† *Ibid*, lxxxii., 141.