

XV. *An Account of the poisonous Root lately found mixed among the Gentian; by the same.*

Read March 17. 1747. **T**HE following Account is the best

I have receiv'd of the poisonous Effects of a noxious Root, lately found in a Parcel of Gentian, and exhibited for Use to several Persons instead of it. And as it is attended with such dangerous Consequences, I thought even an imperfect Relation of Facts had better be given immediately, than to expect more Circumstances, and wait so long for them, till greater Mischiefs might happen, by the Inattention of such as are constantly administering Medicines. The following Account was sent by a Gentleman of *Hambleton* Parish, *Buckinghamshire*; and is found to agree in general with some other fatal Instances that have happen'd since in *London*.

Mary Burgefs, aged 60 Years, about 5 o'Clock in the Morning, drank of an Infusion of only one Pennyworth (without other Ingredients) of supposed Gentian-Root, in half a Pint of white Wine: It is uncertain what precise Quantity she took; but in two Hours afterwards she falter'd in her Speech, had Twitchings and Convulsions of her Hands so far, that the ignorant By-standers alleg'd the poor Woman was drunk; and so left her a-bed till 12 o'Clock, to sleep it out. On their Return however she appear'd much worse, was speechless, and remain'd so 3 whole Days, and did not know any body all that time. In her Illness a Purging came on, and at last carried her off.

Katharine

Katharine Woodward, aged 44 Years, took about a Tea-spoonful of the same Wine, and soon after fell down speechless, and her Limbs were paralytic near 36 Hours: After that she recover'd her Speech, but continued ill above a Fortnight, and Part of that Time her under Jaw was convulsed, and she bled both at Mouth and Nose, in the Beginning.

Mary Diggins, aged 33 Years, tasted a much less Quantity of the same Wine than the former had done; and though terrify'd at her Neighbour's bad Symptoms, she drank warm Water with Oil, in order to vomit; yet she soon stagger'd, and grew delirious, could not swallow any Solids, and lost the perfect Use of her Eye-sight a Fortnight.

The vague Reports of these, and Mr. *Pots's* Cases induc'd me to obtain the Favour of two or 3 Drug-gifts to look over some Gentian-Root, one Parcel of which had no less than a 20th Part of a Root, which at first Sight was discover'd to be no Gentian.

This Root, for which we have yet no Name, is of a greyish brown Colour externally, but it is browner, and more resinous internally: Most of that which I have seen, is about the Thickness of a Finger; tho' some is much larger and whiter; which is a Reason with several for thinking there are two Sorts of it; and indeed some Pieces emit a stronger and more nauseous Smell: But this I apprehend may be occasion'd only by a larger Quantity of Resin in them. All of them are of an acrid pungent Taste, and leave a Dryness on the Tongue.

I judg'd

I judg'd it therefore necessary to try what Effects this Root might have on Dogs, that I might thereby the better conjecture concerning them on the human Species; and though no Man has any Right wantonly to torture or destroy in a cruel manner the least Animal; yet when good Purposes are answer'd in the Whole of Things by inferior Natures yielding to superior ones, a Man may, without just Imputation to his moral Character, sacrifice the Interest of a baser Order to the Happiness of one superior.

With this Intention I decocted half an Ounce of this unknown Root, powder'd grossly in ten Ounces of fair Water, till two were evaporated; then let the Decoction stand 6 Hours. After this I gave half of it, stirring up the Powder, to a young Dog. This made him instantly foam at the Mouth; he grew sick, and vomited Part of the Dose; yet in less than half an Hour reel'd like one drunk, had Twitchings of his Limbs, and after some time the Motion of his Heart was irregular, and intermittent, though strong: He was sleepy about an Hour, but came gradually to himself in half an Hour more, and eat Victuals, which before he refus'd.

Two Days after, the same Dog took 4 Ounces of Decoction of Gentian made as strong as the former; but I discover'd not any bad Symptom from it. I us'd this Quantity, as Gentian-Root is sometimes given to that Quantity in the Practice of Physic. It is above ten Days since he took the first Decoction; and hitherto continues well.

Another Dog took above a Dram Weight of the unknown Root, finely powder'd, and mix'd with Butter:

Butter . It instantly made him foam from the Mouth, and caus'd sudden Vomiting, and, in half an Hour, Weakness of his Limbs, and Staggering, which lasted half an Hour, and then he recover'd.

I tried to give a larger Quantity to another Dog ; but it being too much like other irritating Medicines, caus'd so great a Vomiting, as destroy'd the Effects which a smaller Quantity had before produc'd.

One of the Dogs had some loose Stools after taking it ; another urin'd plentifully.

Like Experiments have been made by Mr. *Pearce* at St. *Thomas's* Hospital, which had nearly the same Event.

Though none of the Dogs were killed by this Drug, but remain to Appearance well, yet all Apothecaries have sufficient Reason to examine very strictly their Gentian, and to reject what they find not genuine, since one of the Women before-mention'd, and a Man that I have heard, of are both dead ; and since Gentian is of general Use in medical Compositions, as well as the primary Ingredient in the cordial Bitters Ladies make for their own Use.