ON ASPARAGUS AS A DIURETIC.

By S. J. Jeaffreson, M.D.

I have used a tincture of asparagus as a diuretic for sixteen or seventeen years, with increasing confidence in its usefulness and efficacy. I have thought it worth the notice of our Association at this particular period, because the time is now approaching at which any gentleman may easily make the experiment of its use. I use the following formula: Take the dried tops of asparagus five pounds; proof spirit, two pints. Take fresh tops of asparagus five pounds. Bruise and press out the juice; evaporate at a low temperature till reduced to one pint, and strain. Lastly, add a pint of rectified spirit. Mr. Daly, chemist, of Warwick, can furnish any person desirous of trying the tincture with a limited supply, and will be happy to make any quantity that may be ordered of him.

The peculiar odour communicated by this substance to the urine, in a remarkably short time, is perhaps as familiar to the laity as the profession. It was this fact that first led me to think that asparagus might constitute a valuable adjunct to our list of diuretics; if not indeed by virtue of any specific diuretic quality it possessed, at least by its power of directing other agents of acknowledged diuretic power to the kidneys.

On referring to such authorities as fell in my way, I found that, whilst some mentioned asparagus as a diuretic in general terms, without any specific reference to its medicinal administration, others omitted entirely to notice this plant, and its diuretic properties entirely. It appeared to me evident that any deductions drawn on this subject had been founded entirely on its effects as an article of food, and not upon any direct experiments of its medicinal administration. The fallacy and uselessness of such deductions is sufficiently apparent; upon generalisations so vague, we might have discarded numerous of our best remedies as delusive, innocuous, or useless.

Suffice it to say that, after some sixteen years’ experience, I have found the tincture of asparagus a useful adjunct to our diuretic remedies. In many cases, I have found it possessing direct diuretic properties when taken alone in water; but, in still more instances, I have found it most useful in promoting the diuretic properties of other drugs, as I conceive, by directing them at once to the kidney; I have repeatedly in my own practice, also in consultation, simply added from half a drachm to two drachms of tincture of asparagus to each dose of an unsuccessful diuretic, and found that copious diuresis was the result.

Mr. Daly informs me that the exact loss by weight in drying the plant is eleven parts out of twelve; in other words, that twelve parts by weight of the fresh shoots are only equal to one part of dried. I have not tried the infusion of the dry shoots, but should think them worthy of trial.

The tincture of asparagus presents the advantage of being capable of combination, so far as I know by experience, with every diuretic substance in use, be it from the animal, the vegetable, or the mineral kingdom.

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