

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE
REMARKABLE MEDICINAL
EFFECTS RESULTING FROM THE
EXTERNAL APPLICATION OF
VERATRIA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649431519

An Investigation into the Remarkable Medicinal Effects Resulting from the External Application of Veratria by Alexander Turnbull

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ALEXANDER TURNBULL

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ON THE
EXTERNAL APPLICATION
OF
VERATRIA.

AN
INVESTIGATION
INTO THE
REMARKABLE MEDICINAL EFFECTS
RESULTING FROM
THE EXTERNAL APPLICATION
OF
VERATRIA.



BY
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LONDON:
LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMAN,
ADAM BLACK, EDINBURGH.

1834.

686.

PREFACE.

It was not the intention of the author to have submitted to the notice of the Profession, the plan of treatment to be considered in the following pages, until it had been put to the test of greater experience ; but in order to satisfy the inquiries which have been made, and to guard against any unfavourable impression as to its utility, which might arise from want of proper information on the subject, he has thought it better to give the results already obtained, along with such directions for its employment as have appeared of most importance.

48, *Russell Square,*
January, 1834.

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AN INVESTIGATION

INTO THE

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THERE are various individuals of the family of plants, known by the name of *colchicaceae*, which are used in medicine. They have been long acknowledged to be possessed of active properties, nearly allied to each other; and the chemical discoveries of later times have explained the similarity which had been observed to exist in their effects upon the animal economy, in health and disease, by demonstrating that these depend upon a peculiar principle common, in some degree, to all, and which has been distinguished by the names of *veratrinum*, *veratrina*, *veratria*, and *sabadilline*. This new substance was discovered by M. M. Pelletier and Caventou, in the year 1819, in the seeds of *veratrum sabadilla* *; and about the same

* Journal de Physique. 1819.

time by Meysner, in Germany. It has hitherto been obtained only from *veratrum sabadilla*, *veratrum album*, and *colchicum autumnale*, but there can be little doubt of its existence in many other plants of the same natural order. Until very lately, the veratria, obtained according to the process employed by its discoverers, was considered to be a simple body; but from a memoir recently given on the subject by M. Couerbe,* it appears that it is in reality composed of three distinct and easily separable principles, on which he has bestowed the names, *veratrine*, *sabadilline*, and *mono-hydrate of sabadilline*. This fact is of considerable importance in the study of the medicinal effects of the veratria of commerce, as some kinds of it, when applied externally, are found to be possessed of properties by no means so active in the removal of disease as are to be observed in others, although to the eye they may appear precisely similar; and this difference may, and in all probability does arise, unless, as sometimes happens, there be an admixture of impurities, from the presence or absence of some one or other of these principles, in greater or less quantity: it is to be hoped, however, that the researches concerning its chemical constitution, which are now in progress, will ere long enable the practitioner to make use of a medicine, the nature of which he will be better acquainted with, and upon the effects of which he

* Journal de Pharmacie. Octobre, 1833.

may be able to rely with the greatest confidence. As these three principles have not as yet been made separately, in a quantity sufficient to become the objects of investigation, it is intended to restrict the following observations exclusively to the veratria in common use.

The veratria of commerce is nearly white in colour, and in the form of a fine powder; it is without smell, but when accidentally or otherwise brought in contact with the mucous membrane of the nose, it induces violent and even dangerous sneezing; when applied to the conjunctiva, it produces great irritation, accompanied by an abundant flow of tears, which does not subside for some hours. Its taste is extremely acrid, but destitute of bitterness; and it acts very strongly upon the mucous membrane of the stomach and intestines: if introduced into the stomach, it proves highly emetic and purgative, for even in old subjects a quarter of a grain acts powerfully upon the bowels; and in some experiments the effects have been so violent as to shew that death would have followed the administration of a few grains. Occasionally it happens that during the preparation of veratria, some of the particles floating in the air are inhaled, and when such is the case its effects are generally purgative. M. Andral, jun. found that when it was applied immediately to the tissues, violent and speedy inflammation was the consequence: that when