AN INAUGURAL DISSERTATION
ON
Veratum Viride.

SUBMITTED TO THE
PRESIDENT, BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND MEDICAL FACULTY
OF THE
University of Nashville,
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MEDICINE.

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OF
Athens Ala
March 1st
1857.

JOHN YORK & CO.,
BOOKSELLERS AND STATIONERS,
NASHVILLE, TENN.
Veratrum Viride

In accordance with a well-established but in my opinion useless custom, it is my duty as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Medicine to write a short monograph on some subject connected with the science of Medicine. I have chosen Veratrum Viride, as it has created so much interest and excitement, among the medical profession for the last few years, in regard to its merits and properties. Much has been said and written in favor of and against it. And the medical opinion is not definitely settled at the present time. Though judging from the tendency of the numerous articles appearing in every number of the medical journals and other periodicals, I think it will soon be adopted by the profession, as one of the best and most reliable of the Materia Medica.

One that will be commensurate in its...
benefits and usefulness. To the deep and thorough investigation through which this article has passed. No remedy ever met with a more determined and invariable opposition than I believe none will ever achieve a greater triumph. Like all new remedies in the beginning, no doubt, many of its advocates too sanguine and enthusiastic claimed more for it than it was possible for it, or any other remedy to accomplish. Others noticing their statements and with making a proper selection of the cases in which to use it or using it in cases in which they had despaired of relief from any other source, and failing to obtain it, jumped at once to the conclusion that it was useless and good for nothing or a very dangerous remedy and one that should not be given under any circumstances———

Generally too much is expected from a new———
- remedy, and some seem to forget that all medicines fail sometimes. But experience, The Touchstone of all things good or bad—has proven, that when properly given, and the condition of the patient and the circumstances of the disease are attended to, that it is a reliable remedy, and is capable of conferring innumerable blessings upon suffering humanity. Having said this much as a sort of introductory preface, I will commence my subject by giving a brief botanical description of the plant, as much confusion has resulted from confounding the Veratum Viride, with the common poke root of this country and the White Sellebore, and other species of the same genus.

Dr. C. C. Winston, in a paper read before the Tennessee State Medical society, on the subject of Veratum Viride, and published in the July number of the Nashville Journal of
of Medicine and Surgery, 1856. Thus describes it: "Veratrum Viride sect. Polyandra. Monn. -ca.- (Rhizoma) U.S. (Secondary List) according to J. Carson is known in the United States, as American Hellebore, Swamp Hellebore, Indian Poke, and Sick Weed. It has a perennial, thick, fleshy root. Tunicated at the top, the lower part solid and sending off numerous white or light yellow radicles. The stem is annual from two to three feet high and pubescent. The leaves at base six inches to a foot long, broad, ovate-nerved, acuminate, of a deep green color and pubescent. Those on the stem narrower and at the summit bracteiform. Flowers in panicles terminal and of a greenish yellow tint. The calyx is wanting, petals six, stamens six, pistil a rudiment (allidow) armed three, when not rudimentary, on the lower portion of the panicle. It is found in various portions of the United States, early in March along the banks of the water courses in meadows.
and swampy places, and belongs to the same order of plants as the Catharanthus roseus, the root is the officinal part. The credit of separating the powers and properties of Veratrum viride from those of the other species of veratrum, and of calling the attention of the medical profession to this article, is due to Dr. W.H. Norwood of Colesbury, South Carolina. As it had been almost wholly laid aside, until he brought it forward, as a remedy possessing great power and usefulness, I might go far ther and say that its peculiar powers were never known, so as to be correctly applied until he investigated them. Veratrum Viride, according to those who have investigated the subject deeply and observed closely, possesses a number of valuable powers. When taken it produces a peculiar warm, biting sensation in the mouth and jaws—very persisting and followed by a—
Copious secretion from the mucous membrane. Where the powdered root is snuffed up the nostrils violent sneezing is the result. When the Tincture is rubbed on the surface it acts as a subcutaneous producing redness and a burning sensation, thereby often relieving pain. It is a powerful diaphoretic, acting from a mere softening and relaxation of the skin, to the most free and profuse perspiration. Its expectorant powers are equalled by few and surpassed by no article in the Materia Medica. Its adangie alteration or deobstination qualities are supposed by many to be equal to, if not superior to, those of iodine and mercury. It is nerve but not narcotic, allaying pain and nervous irritability, without stupefying the system as opium and its compounds or preparations. It is a certain and efficient emetic—much liked by many. But in no case must it be attended with some risk.
I should not advise it for its emetic effect—alone, as we have other emetics less harassing—
that will answer every purpose, though it may—
frequently be necessary to give it in quantities—
sufficiently large to produce emesis, in order—
to overcome the disease—but the vomiting, in this—
case is altogether a secondary consideration. The subdu-
tion of the disease being the leading object. It is—
said to possess a superiority over Tartar emetic, and—
other active and powerful agents of the same class—
in not passing off by the bowels. Having thus hastily—
glanced over those properties I come directly to the—
consideration of the most remarkable and at the—
same time most important physiological—
effect of Bertram Viride—namely, the reduction—
of the heart's action—with perfect safety to the—
patient. This has been attempted by other remedies—
but they are all liable to be followed by unpleasant—
effects. Digitalis is accumulative— and may suddenly—
destroy the patient. For emetic frequently produces excessive purging inflammation ulceration of bowels. But with the Veratrum Viride, the pulse may be reduced from one hundred and sixty to thirty-five beats in the minute, and the patient be perfectly free from any danger and no injury will ensue to the circulatory and nervous systems. And as no other remedy will do this, it is plain that it is a remedy of the highest value. That it does control the arterial action, ad libitum almost is too well authenticated to admit of doubt. The failures are so seldom that we may call it universal on the principle that the exception proves the rule. It does this through the medium of the pneumogastric nerve. Although the number of beats is decreased in the minute, yet the strength and volume of the is increased, and where the pulse is decreased in frequency and not improved in volume and strength, the Veratrum Viride should be discontinued, as it is considered by close observers to be applicable.
To that particular case. When Vernixum viride is given to
as to affect a reduction of the heart's action. Nausea,
 vomiting and occasionally hicough is produced. Though
the reduction may take place, without producing the
nausea, vomiting or hicough. Showing conclusively that
it is not dependent on either of those circumstances.
The venixum is usually given in the form of tincture
by the stomach. Dr. Newcomb's tincture is usually preferred
as it is more uniform in its strength. Of this the dose
for an adult male is six to twelve drops. For females
four to eight drops. For a child one to five drops. These
are the quantities usually mentioned, but particular cases
might require more — and in all cases the effect to be
produced, and not the quantity should be our guide.

The reduction of the pulse, nausea and vomiting are the
points that govern us in administering it. It is given
until one or the other of these effects is brought about and
their withdrawn entirely or lessened in quantity according
to circumstances. If the nausea and vomiting should be in
excess, a small portion of syrup of Morphia and Tincture of Ginger or Sandimmun and Brandy will relieve every uns
pleasant symptom immediately. And The Veratrum Viride,
given in conjunction with a few drops of Sandimmun in a
teaspoonful of Brandy will reduce the heart's action.
Nineteen times out of twenty without producing nausea
and vomiting. This is of some practical importance,
as patients complain very much of the extreme nausea
and in certain cases, as pregnancy, it might be very
desirable to obtain the effect of Veratrum Viride without
exciting vomiting. It may be correctly inferred from
that expression. That I do not believe the article has
any abortive powers greater than belong to emetics
generally. Indeed it is a question with me whether it
has as much as some others. For those who have used
it say that although the nausea is excessive, the vomiting
is easy and there is very slight contraction of the
abdominal muscles. Hence there is but little compres-
sion of the gravid uterus. And as the special circum
Effects is but slightly, if at all, affected by the water
and I see no philosophic reason upon which to base the
opinion. That it has a specific effect upon the foetal in
fetus. That children may have been born dead after this
article had been administered; is no reason that the
remedy had any effect in producing their death.
For it should be borne in mind that all diseases are
frequent causes of abortion—especially in the later
stages of gestation. The febrile and inflammatory dis-
cases particularly are mentioned as playing an impor-
tant part in this respect, and the more acute and
violent the attack, the greater is the liability of abortion
following. And when it is remembered that it is in the
Treatment of these acute and violent affections of a
febrile or inflammatory nature, (the very class of diseases in
which abortion most frequently occurs, no matter what
remedy is employed) that quinine is said to be used, is it
not reasonable to suppose that most of the cases of
abortion following its administration—and changed to its
account, if properly placed, would rest upon the disease itself, instead of the agent employed. In regard to another substance we know that the uninformed believe it does a great deal of mischief, when in fact the mischief done is an effect of the disease. I allude to quinine. Many forms of disease are liable to be followed by a partial or complete loss of hearing. If quinine should happen to be incidentally employed in any of these cases, it would be certain to get all the credit of all the harm done when the effect would have been the same if no quinine had been taken. The two cases appear to me to be parallel and similar in every respect. But we are not entirely dependent on analogy and speculation for a support of our position. If veratum viride possesses a specific deleterious influence on the fetus in utero, as some assert, it ought to display its power by destroying every child whose mother might be so unfortunate as to take the veratum viride during the period of gestation. That such is not the fact is affirmed by a host of practitioners.
who have used it through all the stages of pregnancy -

In the January number of the Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery for the present year is an account of four cases, very interesting and important, as they bear materially on the point in question. They are reported by B.F. Newcomer, M.D., of Reynolds, Georgia. In the first case the gave veratrum viride to a woman, with marked symptoms of premature labour, eight months advanced. The remedy was given in order to produce its full sedative effect. Nauser, free vomiting, and the pulse reduced from one hundred and twenty to sixty beats in the minute. Yet she did not abort but went her full term and was delivered of a fine, healthy, living child. In each of his next two cases it was taken to produce abortion. Large doses were taken and according to the graphic description of Dr. Newcomer, she found her (presumably) prostrated, excessive nauser, frequent vomiting, death-like paleness of the surface, cold clammy perspiration, pulse full, soft and distinct,
"Breathing forty times per minute." The third case was in pretty much the same condition. Both were relieved by appropriate means— and strange to say, neither aborted—but were after wards delivered of living children. Case number four. Lady Jones and a half months advanced in pregnancy. Attempted to destroy herself by taking a large dose about one dram of Tincture of Veratrum Viride. She was relieved and did not abort. In referring to these cases, Dr. Nixon makes the following pertinent remarks: "Here are four cases, coming under my own observation, where Veratrum Viride was taken so as to produce its full sedative effects and in neither case did it produce abortion. The first of these cases it appears to one was in a proper condition to have favored its abortive effects if it possessed any. The uterus was contracting violently, evidently intending to throw off its contents; as however she became affected by the Veratrum Viride, the uterine contractions lessened in severity even before she took..."
any strain." And besides what does he (Brown) do with the other three cases in these three cases. The veratrum viride was taken by pregnant females in good health, for the express purpose of producing abortion or death. Here there were no guards thrown around, neither was there any disease to interfere. The remedy therefore had a fair chance to show its hand. Now I ask in all candor, if it fail to produce abortion in the healthy female, why should we charge it with producing that effect in disease simply because abortion has been known to take place in a case or cases in which it was used? Besides definitely settling the question as far as they go. They are interesting in another point, namely in regard to the large doses that were taken by the three last cases, each having taken it in teaspoonful doses. The inference I draw from them is that the veratrum viride might be used in large doses than is commonly supposed, without any
ultimate ill effects - I think I have been sufficiently explicit to be readily comprehended on that subject. These remain but two points in relation to veratrum-poto to be considered. Namely, some of the advantages claimed for it, over other remedies of the same class - and some of the diseases in which it has been useful and beneficial. It is said to be more certain - hence more reliable and to accomplish a reduction of the heart and arteries, allowing the diseased structure to regain its normal condition, without lessening materially the vital powers or interfering with the recuperative energies of the system. That it does check the arterial action, stop the progress of the disease and bring about a healthy reaction in the system, without plunging the patient into a condition so feeble and precarious - that it will require almost as much skill and precaution to prevent him dying from starvation as to overcome the disease in the first place. I think on this account it is especially applicable to the treatment
of the phlegmation, suppressing upon or associated with an
aspirinic or morbid condition of the system, where the
loss of a small quantity of blood would be absolutely injurious
if not fatal. It is our chief anchor in such cases. And
then other means may be employed at the same time.
I have only to consider the diseases in which
it has been found most useful. I do not think
it necessary to enter into a special consideration
of every form of disease in which the veratrum viride
has been used successfully. As they are all more or less
dependant on or associated with increased vascular
excitement and the veratum viride proves a
curative by subduing that excitement; fevers
and inflammations generally, are the forms of disease
in which this agent is most employed and most
beneficial. It is said to be almost as much of a
specific in meningitis and other phlegmatical as
quinine is for intermittent fever. But it appears
to make a distinction, being much more beneficial.
in the inflammation of the serous membranes and
paranchimous structures than in those of the
mucous membrane. In general terms I think it
may be stated that the more strongly developed
and well marked the inflammation may be, just
in the same proportion will the benefits of the
acetum vini be displayed. Gastritis is said
to be an exception to this rule. But in all
other inflammatory affections it may confi-
dently be relied upon—proper regard being
had to the condition of the patient, circumstan-
ces of the case, state of the disease, &c. It should
always be given as soon in the disease as possible
as its good effects are much more striking
than when given after the disease is under-
handway and continued sufficiently long to
overcome the disease.