

universal habit, or one indulged in by even a majority of the male peasantry, I do not for a moment suppose; but the averment "that the story of the Styrian arsenic-eaters is not only unsupported by adequate testimony, but is inconsistent, improbable, and utterly incredible"—(Kesteven, *Asn. Med. Journal*, 1856, p. 811); or that these are "absurd and exaggerated statements, utterly inconsistent with all that is known concerning the action of arsenic in this or other countries, and but for the fact that they for a time received the literary support of Professor Johnston, and were diffused by him in an amusing book, they would not have required any serious refutation"—(Taylor, *On Poisons*, 2d Ed., p. 92); or that it is a "mess of absurdity," "a pure fable"—(Christison, *Edin. Med. Journal*, 1855-56, pp. 709, 710), are, although justified by the state of knowledge at the time they were made, no longer tenable; but, on the contrary, we can no longer doubt, to use nearly the words of Roscoe, "that decisive evidence has been brought forward not only to prove that arsenic is well known and widely distributed in Styria, but that it is likewise regularly eaten in quantities usually considered sufficient to cause immediate death."

It is probable that many of the physiological actions attributed to it are fanciful, and that its use is mixed up with a good deal of superstition, as, for example, in the case of the poacher who takes it to give him courage to pursue his depredations on ground that is new to him, or that of the ostler who, in giving it to his horses to improve their coats, thinks that it will have no beneficial effect unless he partakes of it at the same time.

It is evident that the confirmation of the existence of the practice of arsenic-eating must lead us to modify some of the opinions that are entertained with regard to the influence of habit on the action of poisons. It has long been notorious, that by habit the human body may be brought to bear with impunity doses of organic poisons, such as opium, which to those unaccustomed to them, would certainly prove fatal; but "it has hitherto been considered by toxicologists that, except within very narrow limits, habit appears to exercise no influence on the action of mineral poisons"—(Taylor, *On Poisons*, p. 89). Though the experiments of M. Flandin, by which he proved that he could bring dogs to bear fifteen grains of arsenious acid in powder in twenty-four hours without injury to their appetite or health, and the practice of administering arsenic to horses, have long been known as pointing rather in the contrary direction, this has been supposed to be due to some peculiarity in the constitution of the lower animals. The facts which have been ascertained with regard to the Styrian arsenic-eaters, and which the above observations confirm,