

SAFFRON.*

Either as a medicine, condiment, perfume, or dye, saffron has from a remote period been highly prized by mankind, and has played an important part in the history of commerce. It consists of the dried stigmas of the *Crocus sativus*, a native of Greece and Asia Minor, naturalized in many parts of Europe, and cultivated in Persia and Cashmere. It is a small plant with a fleshy bulb like corm and grassy leaves, much resembling the common spring crocus of the gardens, but blossoming in the autumn. It has an elegant purple flower, with a large orange-red stigma, the three pendulous divisions of which are protruded beyond the perianth. Homer selects it for one of the four flowers that adorned the couch of Jove and Juno, which has led to the supposition that the exhilarating qualities of its blossoms were known to the poet :

Thick new-born violets a soft carpet spread,
And clustering lotos swelled the rising bed,
And sudden hyacinths the turf bestrew,
And flow'ry crocus made the mountains glow.—*Iliad*.

The Latins named it *Crocus*, from a beautiful youth who was said to have been devoured by the impatience of his love for *Smilax*, but who was transformed by *Hercules* into a flower which still bears his name. By chemists, on account of its golden color, it is called *Aurum philosophorum* ; by others *Sanguis Herculis*, *Aurum vegetabile*, and for its supposed extraordinary virtues in many diseases it was honored with the title of *Rex vegetabilium* and *Panacea vegetabilis*. The English word saffron is derived from *Zahafra*, the Arabian name for this plant, which is nearly the same in the French, Dutch and German languages.

The best saffron, Pliny tells us, grew in Cilicia, on a mountain called *Corycus* ; the next in quality upon Mount *Olympus* in *Lycia* ; and the inferior kinds were gathered at *Phlegia*, in *Macedonia*. The Sicilian was likewise held in repute at Rome, where, after being steeped in wine, it was used as a perfume and sprinkled about the theatres. The same author mentions that the crocus was never employed in garlands, but that a chaplet of saffron, when worn upon the head, allayed the fumes of wine and prevented inebriety ; it was mixed in potations by excessive wine bibbers to enable them to drink more freely without intoxication. The Romans also used saffron in all inflammations, particularly those of the eyes, and it was considered a remedy for ulcerations of the stomach, breast or liver, and was likewise given in coughs and in pleurisy. In India at the present day it is used in medicine as a coloring substance, and in domestic cookery. The *Vytians* prescribe this article in nervous affections attended with vertigo, and where there appears to

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