

## THE CHINESE MATERIA MEDICA.

The following interesting particulars are taken from a notice, which appeared in the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, of London, relating to a manuscript work entitled *Etudes sur la Matière Médicale des Chinois*, by M. Dabry de Theirsant, French Consul in China, and Dr. Soubeiran.

A belief in the specific action of drugs seems to have strongly influenced medical practice in China, as it did but lately that of Europe. Besides, the Chinese believe, as Europeans did in the middle ages, that the appearance of a substance will give a clue to the services it may render to man, *i. e.*, the doctrine of signatures. Thus the lucicle is recommended for affections of the visual organs; a madder (*Rubia mungista*), having a red root, is given for amenorrhœa; *Polygonum tinctorium*, which yields indigo, is reputed efficacious for eruptive fevers; the reniform fruit of the *Kadsura chinensis* is said to possess aphrodisiac properties; while ginseng, with its bifurcated root resembling the legs of a man, is looked upon as restoring virile powers to the sick and aged. Considerations of the same kind are, doubtless, the foundation of the reputation of the *Cordiceps sinensis* as exciting the genital organs; that of the *Bidens parviflora* as infallible in making the nails grow; of the *Vitex incisa* in making the beard grow; and of the *Apocynum juvenus* as a rejuvenescent. These are strange illusions, but they merit indulgence from those whose ancestors administered the lungwort to cure phthisis, the gromwell to cure the gravel, and the carrot for the jaundice.

In other points the Chinese show more scientific tendencies. For instance, the astringent substances of the materia medica, whether vegetable (oak galls and Chinese galls, etc.) or mineral (alum, acetate and sulphate of iron, salts of lead, silver, etc.), are used like the bitters as tonics and febrifuges (*Salix babylonica*, *Populus tremula*, *Dichroa febrifuga*,) to arrest perspiration, for atonic diarrhœa and spermatorrhœa. The aromatics, essential oils, and balsams, obtained from the Labiatae, Umbelliferae, Compositae, Myristicaceae and Styracaceae, garlic, santal, *Daphnidiu cubeba*, etc., are used as diffusible stimulants, febrifuges, antispasmodics, and remedies for catarrhs; wormwood and saffron are considered emmenagogues, and the abortive power of the ergots of rice and maize is well known. Mercurial preparations have been employed from time immemorial in Chinese medicine for syphilis; arsenic for strumous and herpetic affections and certain intermittent fevers; iron as a blood restorer. Borax is prescribed for aphthae; nitrate of soda as a diuretic; carbonate of lime as an absorbent, and an oleo-calcareous liniment for burns. Ancient writers recommended the ashes of sea-weed in cases of goitre. Other substances used by