

# Original and Selected Papers.

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## SENNA EXTRACTED BY ALCOHOL.\*

BY L. SIEBOLD.

I wish to draw the attention of this meeting to a preparation known as "Senna Extracted by Alcohol," which for many years has been employed on the Continent, and has gained much favor as a mild and pleasant purgative. This purified senna, if I may so call it, is obtained by macerating senna leaves for several days in spirit of wine of 60° over proof, and then pressing and drying them; the spirit is recovered from the strained tincture by distillation, and may be used again for the same process. An aqueous infusion of this extracted senna has a purgative action without occasioning any griping, and is so entirely free from any unpleasant taste, that the most fastidious patient need not object to it; indeed, I know of no other aperient which in like manner combines tastelessness with reliable efficacy. It is the principal ingredient in the so-called St. Germain species, a popular remedy, in which it is combined with elder flowers, fennel fruit, aniseed, and cream of tartar.

The fact that an alcoholic extract of senna is devoid of purgative properties was first pointed out by Heerlein, and has been fully confirmed by the researches of Professor Buchheim. Kubly and Dragendorff have also shown that cathartic acid, the active principle of senna, exists in the leaves in combination with calcium and magnesium, and that in this form it is insoluble in strong alcohol, though very soluble in water. Thus it has been generally assumed that senna extracted by alcohol possesses the full purgative action of the drug from which it is made, and this view appears still to prevail at the present time. I have every reason, however, to doubt the correctness of this supposition, as may be seen from the following:—Some years ago I had occasion to take senna frequently and for a long time, and I always found that the action of the extracted leaves was weaker than that of the same senna used in the original state, three drachms of the former being required to produce the same effect as two drachms of the latter. In a number of experiments, subsequently made with the alcoholic extract, I found that this substance when taken alone produced no effect beyond a slight griping, but when taken along with an infusion of the extracted senna, the action of the latter was increased, so as to be equal to

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