

VEGETABLE POISONS.

BY MRS. LOUDON.

At this period, when so much attention has been directed to the subject of vegetable poisons, from the frequent deaths that have occurred, I have thought that my readers might be interested in learning which of the showy inhabitants of our English gardens are most inimical to human life. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the outward appearance of these plants to indicate their deadly nature. They are generally bright in color, and sometimes very elegant in form; and the greater part of them are common in every flower-garden. Among these last may be mentioned the Aconite, also called Wolfsbane, or Monkshood, of which there are various species, all ornamental. The common Monkshood is well known from the amusement children find in pinching the flowers, so as to make the curiously-folded petals start from beneath the hood like two great eyes. These petals look like gigantic and crested stamens, and the hood, which is only a calyx, is generally supposed to be formed of the petals of the flower. The real stamens are, however, the centre of the flower, and they surround a little group of three or five seed vessels or follicles, which, when ripe, burst open at the top to discharge their seeds. The leaves are deeply cut, and the stem, which is tall and upright, is thickened at the base, where it joins the root, so as to give it the appearance of celery; and persons have been poisoned by eating it in mistake for that vegetable. The part of the root which is buried in the ground is also thickened, and resembles horse radish so much, that a party of friends dining together at Dingwall, in Scotland, were poisoned by the cook fancying it was a root of horse-radish she was scraping, when she was, in fact, offering to her master's guests a most deadly poison. There is nothing in the taste of this plant to warn the eater of it of his danger. It is slightly acrid, but not more so than other plants that are perfectly harmless. The Aconite is very nearly allied to the Larkspur, which is also poisonous, the seeds acting as a violent emetic. The Anemone is another poisonous plant, from its acridity and its emetic qualities; and the juice of its leaves will raise blisters. This is also the case with various kinds of Clematis and Ranunculus. The juice of the common Buttercup is extremely acrid, and the species with a creeping, fleshy root is a deadly poison to human beings, though pheasants seem to eat it with impunity, as its tubers have been found in the crops of birds that have been shot.

The seeds of Peony will occasion symptoms resembling cholera, with violent sickness; and the juice of the Poppy is, as everybody knows, highly narcotic. Opium is prepared from the capsule, or seed-vessel of the large White Poppy, which is cultivated for that purpose to a great extent in the East, particularly in Turkey, Persia, and some parts of India.

The capsule of the Opium Poppy is much larger and more fleshy than that of the Corn Poppy, and this fleshy substance is full of a milky juice, which hardens by exposure in the air into a kind of gum which we call opium. In the countries where opium is cultivated as an article of commerce, the Poppies are grown in large fields, and planted in rows to enable the people to reach their heads easily. When the petals of the flowers have fallen, and while the Poppy-heads are yet green and full of juice, the cultivators of opium wound the capsules with a kind of lancet having too blades, so that two cuts are made with each stroke. The milky juice which exudes hardens in the course of the night, and is scraped off the next morning with a blunt knife, before the sun has had time to melt it. It is afterwards kneaded into cakes, and packed in leaves for sale. Laudanum is opium steeped in spirits of wine; and paregoric is laudanum with aniseed and camphor added to it; morphine is the sedative part of opium separated from its intoxicating quality. In England all Poppies are more or less narcotic, and of course poisonous; but the milky juice is not secreted in sufficient quantities to render it worth while to cultivate the Poppies for their opium.

Nearly all the umbelliferous plants are poisonous in a wild state. Even Celery is only rendered wholesome by cultivation. Wild Chervil is also poisonous, but the cultivated kind is eaten in salads. Of all the umbelliferous plants, Water Hemlock, or Cowbane is, perhaps, the most deadly. It grows in marshy land in several places in the neighbourhood of London; and, as it has no bad smell, it is sometimes eaten by cows, who die immediately. Children are also frequently poisoned by chewing it. It is an acrid poison, and destroy life by burning the coats of the stomach. Fool's Parsley is very dangerous, as it often comes up in the gardens with the other parsley—and when both are quite young it is not easy to tell the difference between them. When in flower, it is distinguished by two long beards hanging from each flower, while the common parsley has