

THERAPEUTICS.

THE USE OF THE BOFAREIRA,

("RICINUS COMMUNIS" OF BOTANISTS) AS A MEANS ADOPTED BY THE NATIVES OF THE CAPE DE VERD ISLANDS TO EXCITE LACTATION.

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While engaged in an official investigation into the nature and history of a yellow fever epidemic, prevailing in the Island of Boa Vista, in the Cape de Verds, during the year 1846, my attention was called to a remedy commonly had recourse to there, and in the other islands of the group, to accelerate and increase the flow of milk from the breasts of childbearing women, in cases where that secretion was tardy in appearing, or deficient in quantity when it did appear.

I also learnt that, on occasion of emergency, this remedy could be successfully applied to a still more important use, namely, to produce milk in the breasts of women who are not childbearing, or who even have not given birth to or suckled a child for many years.

The leaves of a plant, called in the language of the country, Bofareira, but which, in reality is the "*Ricinus Communis*" of botanists, and, occasionally, the leaves of the "*Jatropha curcas*," both belonging to the natural family *euphorbiaceæ*, are the means by which these interesting if not extraordinary results are produced.

The Bofareira grows in most if not all, the Cape de Verd Islands. That used by the natives for the purposes I have mentioned, is called by them the *white* bofareira, to distinguish it from what appears to be nothing more than a variety of the same species, the *red* bofareira. The *white*, or that which possesses galactagogue qualities, is recognized by the natives by the light green colour of the stem of the leaf, whilst the leaf stem of the *red* is of a purplish red hue. The latter plant is carefully avoided, as it is said to be a powerful irritant, and, if applied, as it occasionally has been, by mistake, for the *white*, it produces an immediate and often immoderate flow of the menses.

In cases of childbirth, when the appearance of the milk is delayed (a circumstance of not unfrequent occurrence in those islands) a decoction is made by boiling well a handful of the *white* Bofareira in six or eight pints of spring water. The breasts are bathed with this decoction for fifteen or twenty minutes. Part of the boiled leaves are then thinly spread over the breasts, and allowed to remain until all moisture has been removed from them by evaporation, and probably, in some measure, by absorption. This operation of fomenting with the decoction and applying the leaves, is repeated at short intervals until the milk flows upon suction by the child, which it usually does in the course of a few hours.

On occasions where milk is required to be produced in the breasts of women who have not given birth to or suckled a child for years, the mode of treatment adopted is as follows:—

Two or three handfuls of the leaves of the *Ricinus* are taken and treated as before. The decoction is poured, while yet boiling, into a large vessel, over which the woman sits so as to receive the vapour over her thighs and generative organs, the clothes being carefully tucked around her so as to prevent the escape