

Editorial Summary.

THE ACTIVE PRINCIPLE OF CAPSICUM FRUIT.—Mr. J. C. Thresh details in the *Pharmaceutical Journal and Transactions*, the results of certain experiments made with a view of determining whether the fruit of capsicum contains an alkaloid, and, if so, whether it is to this that the activity of the drug is to be attributed. Several writers speak of *capsicin*, and some give it as the active principle, but its composition and properties are not very definitely stated. Mr. Thresh has not yet completed his investigation, but so far he thinks that the active principle is not an alkaloid, and that the so-called *capsicin* does not exist. An alkaloid recalling that of conium, was, however, detected, but not of sufficient quantity to admit of examination as to its properties, but it was found to form well defined salts. The mode in which this body was obtained may be briefly stated. The fruit of the plant, *C. fastigiatum*, as found in commerce, was deprived of the seeds, which, after being thoroughly washed and dried, were found to be entirely devoid of acidity or pungency, and in taste resembling dried beans. 100 grains of the pericarp was powdered, packed in a percolater, and thoroughly exhausted with benzine. Upon evaporation of the percolate, 20 grains of a red, fatty substance, of intense pungency, were obtained. This, dissolved in ether, and agitated with successive portions of dilute sulphuric acid, giving an aqueous fluid of an acrid taste which gave the reactions of an alkaloid. On being neutralized with barium carbonate, a red fat separated, which, treated both with excess of alkali, and shaken with ether, gave a brown oily residue, smelling of conium. Further purification of this substance proved it to be undoubtedly an alkaloid, and in proportion as the purification was carried so did the acidity disappear, proving that the activity of capsicum must be attributed to another source. Mr. Thresh will continue his investigations.

SPIRIT OF NITROUS ETHER.—It is asserted by Mr. J. U. Lloyd, (*Am. Jour. Pharm.*), that for every pound of pure spirit of nitrous ether sold in the United States there are sold one hundred pounds of an adulterated article; and that, in nearly all cases, the adulteration consists of water. The actual ether strength is not, at first, affected by this dilution, as the water merely takes the place of alcohol; but it is said that the water detracts from the keeping properties of the preparation, and that decomposition, in which nitric and acetic acids are liberated, rapidly ensues. The dilution with