

THE GROWTH AND USES OF BENZOIN.*

The Benzoin, or frankincense, in commercial parlance called "Benjamin," is a more common article of commerce than camphor. Although in general request for the ceremonies of the Romish, Mahomedan, Hindu, and Chinese worship, there is no evidence that the Greeks or Romans, or even the early Arabian physicians, had any acquaintance with Benzoin; nor is the drug to be recognized among the commodities which were conveyed to China by the Arab and Persian traders between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, although the camphor of Sumatra is expressly named. The first mention of benzoin occurs in the "Travels of Ibn Batuta," who, having visited Sumatra during his journey through the East, A. D. 1325-49, notes that the island produces *Java Frankincense* and camphor. There is no further information about the drug until the latter half of the following century, when it is recorded that in 1461 the Sultan of Egypt sent to Pasquale Malipiero, Doge of Venice, amongst other articles, a present of 30 *rotoli* of *Benzoi*. Agostino Barberigo, another Doge of Venice, was presented in similar manner, by the Sultan of Egypt, with 35 *retoli* of aloes wood, the same quantity of *Benzin*, and 100 loaves of sugar. The occurrence of benzoin in Siam is noted in the journal of the voyage of Vasco da Gama, and the Portuguese traveller Barbosa, who visited Calicut, on the Malabar coast, in 1511, mentions *Benzin* among the more valuable items of export. In the early part of the seventeenth century there was direct commercial intercourse between England and both Siam and Sumatra. An English factory existed at Siam until 1623, and benzoin was doubtless one of the commodities exported.

The tree which produces this so-called gum does not attain to any considerable size. It is an inhabitant of the hot plains, and flourishes best in the rich moist lands fitted for the cultivation of marsh rice. The plants are propagated from a seed, which resembles a small brown nut, and but little care is required except to keep the shrubs clear from weeds. Before the sixth or seventh year the gum is obtained by making incisions in the bark, when the substance exudes, and is scraped off in like manner as the opium poppy. The first juice is the purest and most fragrant, and hardens on exposure to the air, when it becomes brittle and transparent. The resin is white and transparent, and about three pounds are given by each tree. The white Benjamin is termed *cowrie luban* in India, and is a superior kind. Afterwards a browner description is extracted, and finally, when the tree has become exhausted, and has been cut down, an inferior kind is obtained from the scraping of the wood. The three different varieties accordingly bear relative values in commerce. The resin which exudes during the first three years is said to be

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