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Professor Balfour

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IV. *Botanical Notices.* By Professor BALFOUR. 1. *Qualities of Hieracium virosum.*

The following notes have been supplied by Dr Christison :—

“There are some poisonous species among the *Cichoriaceæ*. Among them may be mentioned the *Hieracium virosum*, Pall., which is often mistaken for *H. sabaudum*, and more especially *Crepis lacera*. (Tenore, Flora Neap. ii., p. 179, tab. 79, et ejusdem Syn., p. 402. DC. Prod. vii. 161.)

“Tenore says of this *Crepis*, in his Synopsis, p. 403 :— ‘Venenatissima planta lacte maximè acri scabens; eademque, cum aliis sponte nascentibus Cichoreis, ad juscula conficienda lecta, sæpe illa comedentes miserrimè necavit.’

“Von Martens, in his ‘Italien,’ informs us respecting this plant :—‘The *Angina* of the Neapolitans, called in the Abruzzi *Castellone*, constantly grows near calcareous rocks, and abundantly in the lower forest districts of the Apennines, from the Abruzzi to Calabria, especially on Gargano, where Micheli (Hortus Pisan., p. 81) represents it is as an herb which kills pigs; also on the mountains of Caserta, Anienza, &c. The leaves resemble those of the dandelion, the chicory, and other species of the same family, which are much used by the country people as food; and as these plants are all used in spring before they flower, mistakes are easily committed, and poisoning with the *Angina* is consequently not uncommon. Gussone pointed it out to me on Mount St Angelo, above Castellamare, near Naples, at an elevation of 2500 feet, and mentioned an instance of poisoning of a whole family by it. The mother and children died in fearful tortures, and the husband alone recovered. On 21st July it was in full flower, and was then easily known by its tuft of gold-yellow flowers, and the mealy bloom which covered particularly the upper part of the plant, giving it a grayish-white appearance. When recognised in this state, the information is spread from mouth to mouth, so that the chicory gatherers may avoid in spring the places in which the *Angina* has been seen during the previous summer.’ (Schultz, in Buchner’s ‘Repertorium für Pharmacie,’ 1853, ii. 77, from ‘Bonplandia,’ i. 4).”

2. *Boethius' Notice of Solatrum amentiale, and its effects on the troops of the King of Norway.*

Boethius, in his "Historia Scotorum," says, "when Sueno, king of Norway, saw his brother add England to his Danish kingdom, he wished to equal his brother in glory and in empire. Accordingly, he came with an army to Scotland, alleging as a cause of war his desire to revenge the slaughter of his relative Carnus, and of other Danes slain with him at Barre, Crowdane, and Gemmere. But though Sueno came as it is said, with the view of acquiring fame and honour, yet he was not to be compared to his brother Canute; for he slew innocent children, women, and aged persons. When King Duncan heard of these shameful cruelties committed on his people, he felt called upon to prepare himself for battle. He assembled a large army, and divided it into three parts; the first battalion was given in charge to Macbeth; the second to Banquho; and he commanded the third himself, taking with him the greater part of the nobility. The armies of Duncan and Sueno met at Culross, not far from the place where the abbey of the Cistercian monks afterwards was built. The battle was carried on with great vigour, and with immense slaughter, on both sides. The Scots were defeated, and put to flight. The Danes, however, were so fatigued and broken up that they were unable to pursue their enemies, and they remained on the spot all night under cover. Next day, perceiving that the tents had disappeared, they fell upon the booty which had been left. At the same time, an order was given that no injury should be done to any unarmed person. In this way they hoped to conciliate the people, and make them declare in their favour. After this, Sueno pursued Duncan with his whole army. Having learned that King Duncan had fled to the Castle of Bertha, and that Macbeth was gathering fresh forces to resist his incursions, he laid siege to the said castle. When Duncan saw himself surrounded on all sides by enemies, and after having been closely beset for eight days, he sent, by advice of Banquho, a second messenger to Macbeth, commanding him to remain at Inchecuthill until further notice. At the same, time he despatched a herald to Sueno, with a request that he would

allow him and his nobles to depart from the castle with their lives and fortune. Duncan made the request, although he knew it would be refused, with the view of making his enemies suppose that the castle would be given up without any further delay. Accordingly, having sent a messenger, he desired that Sueno would send a commissioner to the city, in order to arrange the terms of surrender. When he came, Duncan pretended that he did not wish to offer further resistance to Sueno, and that he was ready to give up the citadel. At the same time, in order to conciliate Sueno, and to cause a little delay, he promised to send a large quantity of provisions for the use of his army, in the shape of wine, beer, and corn. This offer pleased Sueno and his army, for they were in great want of fresh provisions, in consequence of the cattle and grain having been previously taken away to fortified places by the Scots. Before transmitting the provisions the Scots mixed the wine and beer with the juice of the maddening *Solatrum (Solatrum amentiale)*. This is described as follows:—"Herba est ingentis quantitatis, acinos principio virides, ac mox ubi maturuerint purpureos et ad nigredinem vergentes habens, ad caulem enatos, sub foliis latentes, seque quasi retrahentes, vimque soporiferam, aut in amentiam agendi si affatim sumpseris habentes, magna ubertate in Scotia proveniens." An herb of great size, bearing berries, at first green, and, when ripe, purple, or verging to black, attached closely to the stem, and concealed under the leaves, as it were withdrawing themselves; possessing a soporific power, and driving to madness if taken largely; attaining great luxuriance in Scotland.

Sueno and his soldiers eagerly partook of this poisoned wine and beer, and swallowed them in large quantities. Accordingly, they soon fell into a profound comatose sleep. In the meantime Duncan sent a faithful messenger to Macbeth, telling him to come immediately with his army as the enemy were an easy prey. Macbeth accordingly having crossed the Tay, led his army to Bertha, and going out by the gate opposite to the position occupied by the Norwegians, under the guidance of Banquo, he reached the camp of the enemy. Then raising a loud cry, in order to ascertain if any of the enemy were awake or sober, they proceeded to slaughter their foes. The greater part, involved in deep sleep, were

murdered in their beds. Some, driven to madness, did not understand what they did, or what was being done by their enemies. Some who had suspected the enemies' gifts, and had been kept free of the drug, ran to the king and endeavoured to rouse him, but finding that all was in vain, they carried him bodily during the night to the mouth of the Tay, where their ships were, and setting sail, proceeded to Norway. Thus the Norwegian army was destroyed. None escaped except Sueno, and those persons who were with him, along with the sailors. It is said that for many years afterwards all who were made knights in Norway were sworn to revenge the slaughter of their friends in Scotland. The other Danish ships which were left in the Scottish Firth were afterwards sunk by the violence of an east wind.

While the Scotch were rejoicing over this victory, the Danes made another invasion, and arrived at Kinghorn. Macbeth and Banquo were sent to oppose them, and gained a complete victory, slaughtering many, and driving the rest to their ships. The latter gave great sums of gold to Macbeth for the purpose of getting permission to bury their friends that were slain on the island of Inchcolm. It is said that old monumental stones, with the Danish inscriptions, were long observed on this island.

The question to be solved is, what is this *Solatrum* mentioned by Boethius. Bellenden, in his translation of Hector Boece's work calls it *Mekilwurt*. It appears to be *Atropa Belladonna*, judging by the characters of the fruit, &c., as they are given in the original. This plant is not very common in Scotland at the present day. It is found, however, near old castles, where it seems to have been cultivated for medicinal purposes. Not very far from Culross, in Fife, there is abundance of it.

V. *Notes on Muscari latifolium of Dr Kirk*. By MAXWELL T. MASTERS, Esq. Communicated by Professor BALFOUR.

Dr Balfour, stated that having seen a description of a new species of *Bellevalia* by Mr Masters, in the "Proceedings of the Linnean Society," and having remarked that the plant was obviously that described by Dr John Kirk at a