

MEXICAN CACTUS A SUBSTITUTE FOR CACTUS GRANDIFLORUS.*

BY OLIVER ATKINS FARWELL.

For a great number of years, a cactus has been imported from Mexico as official *Cactus Grandiflorus*. In view of this fact, it may be of interest to pharmacists and physicians to know that this spurious drug that is being marketed as the genuine in all probability has not the therapeutic properties that have been proved by experimentation and administration to belong to the genuine *Cactus grandiflorus* Linn. Having long suspected the identity of this drug and believing it to be a spurious article, I took the necessary steps some years ago to have flowering and fruiting specimens taken from the plants that produced the commercial drug in order that it might be properly identified. The specimens were duly received and upon careful examination the species was found to be that which perhaps is best known to the botanical world as the *Cereus nycticallus* Link; also as *Cereus pteranthus* Link and Otto. Britton and Rose, who are acknowledged by all to be the leading authorities on the Cactaceae, are now revising the Cactus Family and they have split the old genus *Cereus* into a number of genera. The Night Blooming *Cereus* and allied plants have been made to constitute the genus *Selenicereus* and that species from which is derived the Mexican drug is *Selenicereus pteranthus* (Link and Otto) Britton and Rose. The genuine *Cactus grandiflorus* Linn. becomes *Selenicereus grandiflorus* (Linn) Britton and Rose. The two species differ in many characters as well as in geographical distribution; the flowers of the plant yielding the Mexican drug are funnel-shaped while those of *Selenicereus grandiflorus* are saucer-shaped; the areolae on the stems of the latter bear a few small spines around 5 mm. in length and an equal number of slender, flexuous bristles around 1 cm. in length; the areolae on the stems of the Mexican drug bear only small spines, the flexuous bristles so characteristic of the genuine article being absent. A few years ago, Mr. E. M. Holmes, of London, Eng., in a private letter, most emphatically denied the existence of *Cactus grandiflorus* Linn. in Mexico and claimed that it was impossible to get the genuine crude drug from that country. A search of botanical literature confirmed the statement of Mr. Holmes that Mexico is not a country in which the *Cactus Grandiflorus*, to use its official title, is native; the species is not known there except as a show plant in some greenhouse or plant conservatory; it is therefore impossible, on this account alone, that it could be a source of the Mexican drug. This spurious drug from *Selenicereus pteranthus* is still coming into the country from Mexico and being marketed as the genuine *Cactus Grandiflorus*.

DEPARTMENT OF BOTANY,
PARKE, DAVIS & COMPANY,
DETROIT, MICH.

OLD BOTANICAL GARDENS.

A writer in the *Gartenwelt* (Berlin) states that while prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth century botanic gardens existed, it was not until about this time that great interest was exhibited. In 1560 there were

fifty such gardens in Italy, one was founded at Pisa in 1543, one at Padua in 1546 and still exists. The garden of Bologna was founded in 1568 and those at Rome and Florence were commenced about the same time. The one at Leiden, Holland dates from 1575.

* Scientific Section A. Ph. A., Asheville meeting, 1923.