

Of this mixture he was given one tablespoonful every two hours and for each dose that was taken out there was poured in an equal quantity of the infusion of combretum. During the first week, although he was not sleeping well and was distinctly nervous, the symptoms were in no way violent. At the end of this time, however, he became extremely restless and suffered intensely with insomnia, although there was no diarrhoea. The second week of his stay in the hospital was no whit less painful to him than to the opium habitué under ordinary treatment. As the combretum did not seem to exercise any quieting action whatsoever it was stopped and the case treated along conventional lines. He remained in the hospital about six weeks and so far has not returned to the drug.

While from this single case one is, of course, not justified in drawing definite conclusions, it does not seem to me probable that the plant exercises any peculiar effect upon the central nervous system which would explain its action in opium habit. It seems perfectly plausible to ascribe its virtues to the large percentage of tannic acid which it contains. When the infusion is mixed with the opium there is a heavy precipitate consisting, presumably, largely of the tannates of the opium alkaloids. As we administered it, the bottle was always well shaken so that these were also taken.

The effect of the tannic acid will be two-fold. In the first place one of the most troublesome symptoms of the withdrawal of the opium is diarrhoea, which, of course, the tannin would tend to restrain and as the dose of tannin in the method of administration recommended is proportionate to the amount of opium withdrawn, the need of the intestines is gradually met as it occurs. The second factor which has occurred to me, is that the tannate of morphine which is formed, being but very sparingly soluble is absorbed from the intestinal tract very slowly so that instead of the abrupt pleasurable effects of the opium the drug is so slowly absorbed that the patient is continually under a comparatively mild degree of narcotic effect. This, while not sufficient to give rise to the pleasurable sensations is sufficient to prevent the violent disturbances of the nervous system so that with a little determination the patient is able to endure for a time without the drug. As far as I can determine it has been the experience of others that the drug is more useful in reducing the dose than in producing complete cures.

I believe that combretum sundiacum is of service in the treatment of the opium habit, but whether it is of any more service than tannic acid or the other vegetable astringents, I am not prepared at present to say.—H. C. W., Jr.

THE RED TAPE OF DUTY.

“The boy who ‘stood on the burning deck,’ and who committed suicide on a technical point of obedience, has been held up to the school children of this century as a model of faithfulness to duty. The boy was the victim of a blind adherence to the red tape of duty. He was placing the whole responsibility for his acts on some one outside himself. He was helplessly waiting for instruction in the hour of emergency when he should have acted for himself. His act was an empty sacrifice. It was a useless throwing away of human life. It did no good to the father, to the boy, to the ship, or to the nation.”—*William George Jordan.*