

1950 Viburnum foliis ovatis acuminatis serratis venosis, petiolis lævibus.

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XV. *An Account of the Cicuta, recommended by Dr. Storke; by William Watson, M. D. F. R. S.*

*To the Royal Society.*

Gentlemen,

Read Feb. 17, 1761. **I**N a paper I lately laid before you, I endeavoured to demonstrate, that the *Cicuta major*, which, since the publication of Dr. Storke's work at Vienna, had been used medicinally in England, was the plant intended by that gentleman; and not the *Cicuta aquatica*, as had been suggested by some practitioners here. And Dr. Storke has removed every doubt, which could remain, by transmitting hither to Mr. Hudson, a very ingenious apothecary and botanist, some leaves of the *Cicuta major*, or common hemlock, which grew at Vienna, and is of the same species with the plant so denominated here.

As Dr. Storke informs us, that, since the publication of his treatise, he has received letters from almost every part of Europe, confirming his good opinion of the virtues of the *Cicuta*, and as he is about to publish a second treatise upon the same subject, containing still more extraordinary relations of cures brought about, by administering that plant; there is no doubt therefore, but that endeavours will be

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made here, to confirm the truth of the doctor's assertions; more especially, as some of the diseases, in which Dr. Storke found the *Cicuta* attended with great success, are such as are of all others the most shocking to human nature, and have, by too long experience, been found to give way to no other means.

Hence it is highly important to every one, more particularly to physicians, that the very plant, directed by Dr. Storke, be administered, and no other in the place of it, either through inattention or want of knowledge; as judgment in the physician is of no real service, unless his prescriptions are faithfully prepared.

For these reasons, it may not be improper to inform those medical practitioners, who are not conversant in botany, and who may nevertheless be desirous of trying the effects of the *Cicuta*, that at this time of the year there is another plant, growing in the same places, and often mixed with it, so much resembling it in appearance, as not, without some attention, to be distinguished from it; which, however, greatly differs from it in sensible qualities. Great care therefore ought to be taken, that the one of these should be selected from the other.

The plant so much resembling hemlock, is the *Cicutaria vulgaris* of the botanists, which in some parts of England is called cow-weed, in others wild cicely. Its greatest resemblance to hemlock is in the spring, before the stalks of the leaves of the hemlock are interspersed with purple spots; and therefore, at that season, more easily mistaken for it; though, even then, the leaves of the hemlock smell much stronger,

stronger, are more minutely divided, and are of a deeper green colour, than those of the cow-weed. Afterwards, indeed, they are more easily distinguished, as the *Cicutaria* flowers at the end of April and beginning of May, and the *Cicuta* not till June, when the other is past: to say nothing of the flowering stalk of the cow-weed being furrowed, and somewhat downey; and that of the hemlock, smooth, even, and always spotted. These plants differ likewise very essentially in their seeds, which in the cow-weed are long, smooth, and black, when ripe; whereas those of the hemlock are small, channelled, and swelling towards their middle.

Besides the cow-weed, there is another plant in appearance very like the hemlock, although evidently differing from it in other respects; and, unless I am very greatly misinformed, quantities of this have been collected, and sold in London for the hemlock. This is more likely to be taken for the hemlock in summer or autumn, as it is an annual plant, and is produced and flowers late in the season. The plant here meant is the *Cicuta minor* of Parkinson, or *Cicutaria tenuifolia* of Ray. This, however, is easily distinguished from hemlock, by its leaves being of the colour and shape of parsley, its flowering stalks having no purple or other spots, and not having the strong smell peculiar to hemlock.

To the two plants before-mentioned, may be added a third, which very frequently, more especially about London, grows along, and is mixed, with the hemlock. This plant is called, by the late excellent Mr. Ray, Small hemlock-chervil with rough seeds; and is denominated by Caspar Bauhin, in his *Pinax*,

*Myrrhis sylvestris feminibus asperis.* This, like the cow-weed before-mentioned, can only be mistaken for hemlock in the spring. It may be distinguished then from it, by the leaves of the myrrhis being more finely cut, of a paler green colour, and, though they have somewhat of the hemlock smell, are far less strong, and have no spots. This plant flowers in April, and the seeds are ripe before the hemlock begins to flower; and these seeds are cylindrical, rough, and terminate in an oblong point.

The leaves of hemlock are most fit for medicinal purposes, as being in their greatest perfection, when collected in dry weather, from the middle of May to the time that their flowering stems begin to shoot; as by that time the plants will have felt the effects of the warm sun, have acquired an highly virose smell, and the stems of the leaves are covered with purple spots, an argument of the exaltation of their juices: and we should be attentive here to give them all these advantages, as three degrees of latitude, and other circumstances of soil and situation, may occasion a very sensible difference in the qualities of the same plant; an instance of which occurs in the plant under consideration, and may be one of the causes, why the effects of the hemlock have not been such here, as we are assured they are at Vienna; viz. Dr. Storke says, that the root of hemlock, when cut into slices, pours forth a milky juice, which I have never seen it to do here in England.

There are several vegetables, which, though they thrive apparently well, their productions are, nevertheless, not the same as in other parts of the world, where the heat is more intense, and the summers are

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of longer continuance. It would be extremely difficult here, though the plants thrive very well, to produce from the white poppy, or *Cistus ladanifera*, either the opium or the labdanum, the known production of these vegetables in other parts of the world. No art can make here the *tragacantha* pour forth its gum, the *lentiscus* its mastic, or the candle-berry myrtle of North America its sebaceous concrete. To these might be added many others, too tedious to mention.

In such mild winters as the last, the leaves of hemlock may be procured in any part of them; but they are not to be depended upon, as their specific smell is then comparatively weak, their juices poor and watery, and they are wholly without spots.

I am,

With all possible regard,

Gentlemen,

Your most obedient

humble servant,

W. Watson.