

[Obtaining Opium in America / Culture of the Poppy Plant] Dr. William James Almon

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Contributors

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Description

Directions and observations on poppy cultivation in America and the Netherlands, pp. 246-47. Original source unknown.

Transcription

A gentleman in America, has found that Opium may be as easily obtained in our climates as in any other, and probably in as great quantities and at a small expence.

Instead of cutting the seed capsule only, having observed that the whole plant contained the same kind of juice, he at once cut off the head of the poppy, when in its highest degree of succulence, immediately after it had done flowering, as close to the seed vessel as possible: the juice immediately after amputation, springs out from the neck very freely. It soon accumulates in considerable quantity, and becomes a thick, darkish coloured paste, that heals up the wound, and prevents more of it from exuding. When it has attained this state, he again cuts off the top of the stem, carrying home all the pieces thus cut off, where they are left to dry at leisure. A fresh bleeding again commences, which in its turn gradually stops as before. The stalk is again cut over, and the same process is repeated, as long as any juice exudes from the wound, in sufficient quantity to pay for the collecting it. In this way may be obtained perhaps an hundred times the quantity of opium from a single plant, that ever could be got from the capsules alone, and that perhaps at less than one tenth part of the expence.

When the juice has acquired a proper degree of thickness upon the pieces cut off, it is scraped from them, it is scraped from them in the house, and made up into lumps of a proper size, and when it becomes sufficiently dry it is carried to market. [-]ry this simple process. Opium may be obtained in any part of Europe, with as much facility as in Asia, and of as good a quality.

Culture of the poppy plant

Every gardener knows that the poppy grows very easily in every cultivated soil, if the ground be made fine, (the richer it is, no doubt the more luxuriant will be the crop,) the seeds may be sown in drills, very thin, at about one foot from each other; the plants will soon come up. As soon as weeds appear, let the intervals between the rows, be hoed with a hand hoe. When the weeds begin again to appear, let it be hoed a second time; and now thin out the

plants in the rows, so as to let them stand at not less than six inches from each other. Thus treated, they will prosper abundantly, and no other care is required but to keep down all weeds with the hoe, should any appear. After the plant has advanced to that stage of its growth, indicated before, let it be treated as above, and the business is finished.

In the Netherlands, great fields of poppies are cultivated for the sake of their seeds, which are there

employed as an article of food, and are esteemed a great delicacy. The seeds are not in the smallest degree narcotic, or deleterious, and there are few seeds more generally pleasing to the palate in their natural state, or thought to be more nourishing. The produce of seeds from an acre is very considerable. From these seeds also may be extracted an oil which is esteemed for some purposes.

Where the seeds are the object, the culture should be in every respect the same as indicated above. But in this case, the tall white poppy only, should be reared, as the pods of this kind are large and all ripen nearly at the same time. But when Opium is the object in view, the black or carnation poppy, whether double or single ought to be preferred, as that kind produces a greater quantity of seeds, and continues longer in a succulent state than the other.

Obtaining Opium in America / Culture of the Poppy Plant recipe from Early Modern Maritime Recipes:
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