REMARKS ON A NEW PLANT RICH IN TANNIN.

By CHARLES MOORE, F.L.S., &c.

[Read before the Royal Society of N.S.W., June 4, 1890.]

In a letter lately addressed by me to the newspapers, I gave a few details regarding an American plant which possesses to a large degree, tanning properties. There seems, however, from what has since appeared in the press and from private communications, that more information relative to this plant is required. It is therefore with that object that I now venture very briefly to address you on the subject. The plant in question, *Rumex hymenosepalus* (Torrey), belongs to the natural family Polygonaceae many members of which are rich in furnishing large supplies of oxalic acid, while some yield strong purgative properties, but in addition to these qualities, the prevailing characteristic of the genus *Rumex* is that of astringency. We might therefore naturally expect to find in some of the species the tanning principle more or less developed. It was not, however, so far as I have been able to learn, till 1868 that this principle was known to reside in the root stock to any great extent. In that year a package of the roots was sent from Texas to the Agricultural Department at Washington, accompanied by a letter stating that by analysis they were found to yield 32 per cent. of tannin. Curiously enough this letter was lost sight of till 1878, when fresh roots were reported on by the Commissioner of Agriculture.

In the American Journal of Pharmacy of 1876, p. 42, this plant is referred to as having been sent from St. Antonio as Indian roots or Yerba del Indio or Raiz del Indio. The root is described as consisting of heavy globular or fusiform pieces, about 6 inches long, and from 1 to 3 inches in diameter. When fresh it is externally of a reddish-brown colour, and internally varies from a bright to a yellowish-brown. The roots are said to be produced in clusters in a manner similar to small potatoes, and grow near the surface of the ground. The plant seems to have a wide range in a natural state. It has been found in many parts of Mexico, where it is said to have been used for tanning purposes for over two centuries. It is abundant in Texas and in South Western America. The stem and leaves are acid, due to the presence of oxalic acid, and are in consequence occasionally used in California and Utah for culinary purposes. Several analyses of this plant have been furnished, and these vary very much, but under favourable conditions the roots are said to yield 37 per
cent. of tannin; but in none of the analyses has any substance been found that would prove injurious to leather.

Some go so far as to think that this Rumex will supersede the use of Valonia and Gambier. It is however quite possible in this country the tanning properties of this 'dock' may not be so great as it is represented they are in other lands. In giving these details I have not drawn on my own imagination, but have simply stated the asserted facts as furnished by the Kew authorities. The names by which this species of Rumex is generally known are: Gouagra in Mexico, Canaigre in Texas, and Wild Pie plant in Utah and California; and in these quarters will probably be found the sources from whence supplies of seeds may be most readily procured. I would add that in this country no species of the genus Rumex or "Dock," either indigenous or introduced, possesses any known tanning material.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. Moore—I have been inundated with letters since I wrote that letter to the press. In that it was made plain that docks and sorrels were only mentioned as examples of the genus Rumex, but I never intended to convey the idea that all the docks possessed tannic principles. That this plant will I think likely become of some importance is almost certain. Our climate suits it admirably, and it can therefore be easily grown. I would cultivate it in the same way as I would cabbage. I have taken measures to get the seeds, but hope that no one will rely upon me entirely for seeds. Anyone having correspondents in Mexico can obtain them from there. It is a plant of most easy cultivation, and I shall do all I can to get the seeds and give it a fair trial. It is very singular however that no tannic principles should have been found in any of the other species.

Mr. H. C. L. Anderson—I have been very much interested in the paper, particularly as I received some specimens two weeks ago from Victoria, where it has been grown for the last three years. I am having it analysed by Dr. Helms, for the purpose of determining the amount of tannic acid in it. We know it averages from 26 to 40 per cent. It may, however, like some docks, become a curse more than a blessing. I hear though, that in Victoria ground becomes worth £10 an acre by the cultivation of this weed. When the analysis is made I will send it to Mr. Moore that he may see whether under the influence of our climate and soil we can compare it to the English and American analyses. Very probably it will become a commercial product of some value.

Mr. F. B. Kyngdon—Mentioned that the publications of the Department of Agriculture of the United States contained two
papers on the same subject. Such publications were in the
Library of the Society.

The President—in thanking Mr. Moore for his paper, said it
had also provoked remarks of an interesting nature. What Mr.
Anderson had said would prove of interest to many people at
present, and he hoped when that gentleman had had his analyses
made he would bring them under the notice of the Society.

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RECORD OF HITHERTO UNDESCRIBED PLANTS
FROM ARNHIME'S LAND;

By Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, K.C.M.G., M.D., Ph.D., F.R.S., &c

[Read before the Royal Society of N.S.W., July 2, 1890.]

The plants of Arnheim's Land became gradually known to a
now large extent in the course of this century through successive
observers. The earliest investigations were by the celebrated
Robert Brown, during Flinders' memorable exploratory voyage,
when from December 1802 till the commencement of March 1803
the east coast of Arnheim's Land was surveyed. During Admiral
P. P. King's four geographic voyages from 1818 to 1821 it fell to
the share of Allan Cunningham, to reveal much of the vegetation
along the north and the west coast of the territory mentioned.
Though other navigators touched subsequently at the same region,
no special phytologist was attached to their expeditions; some of
these voyages however enriched other branches of the natural
sciences; and valuable gatherings of plants were secured by Dr.
Bynoe, while Admiral Stokes visited Arnheim's Land in 1839, for
the great Kew establishment.

Leaving minor other kindred efforts out of consideration, it was
only in 1855 and 1856, that further large access to our knowledge
of the plants of Arnheim's Land could be obtained, the interior
regions then for the first time coming largely within reach, through
Aug. Gregory's expedition, though Leichhardt had crossed in
1845 from the Roper River to Port Essington, and had not been
unobservant of the flora. About a dozen years ago Mr. Schultz,
a special and successful emissary of the Adelaide Botanic Garden,
traversed for botanical collecting purposes the vicinity of Port
[https://doi.org/10.5962/p.359083](https://doi.org/10.5962/p.359083).

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