

Clinical Notes

ALOE VERA (JELLY LEEKS)

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I was born and raised in the town of Tzechow, which is at the foothills of the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayan Range in western China. Like most boys, I preferred to fly kites, catch birds and plant flowers rather than to memorize the Confucian classics.

One day I caught a young bird, much like a vireo, freshly out of its nest. I put the bird in a wooden cage which had bars on one side only. Having raised two of the bars, I placed the cage on the ground near the tree in which the nest rested and waited in ambush. Finally the mother bird came to the cage with a worm to feed her fledgling. I cautiously sneaked up behind and pushed down the bars, thus capturing both the mother and her child, and took them home.

My first desire was to have a larger and better home for my protégés. Knowing the futility of asking either my grandmother or my mother for money, because it was against the Buddhist belief to keep live subjects in captivity, I decided to make a cage myself with strips of bamboo. In order to make holes in the horizontal girders through which the bars were to pass, I employed a hot iron rod heated in the burning coals of the kitchen stove. By holding one end with a piece of damp cloth, I was able to burn a series of well spaced holes with the red hot point of the rod. Accidentally the damp cloth slipped, and the thumb and the index finger of my right hand were burned. The burn was very painful, and blisters developed. At last I went to my ninth aunt, Narcissus, who was only a few years my senior and always sympathetic when I was in trouble. "Why don't you apply some jelly leek?" she exclaimed. It happened that she had a piece on her dresser, which she had picked that morning from one of the pots in the garden, for use on her hair. The jelly lubricated her luxuriant black hair and imparted a beautiful gloss. She split open a section of one leaf and applied the jelly side to my blisters. It had a wonderfully soothing effect—a marvelous relief! In a few days the sores were healed.

Thirty-eight years later, in 1939, I called on Dr. Harold N. Cole, of Cleveland, on the recommendation of my good friends Drs. A. C. Siddall and W. Frederick Bohn of Oberlin Ohio, for the treatment of an extensive ulceration on my right sole, which was the result of an overdose of radium received two and one-half years previously in China when I was suffering from a cutaneous ailment. Dr. Cole advised applying Aloe vera and kindly arranged for me to procure two leaves of the plant. I cannot describe my surprise when I opened the parcel and found two leaves of the "jelly leek" which I had known all these years! With rest in the hospital and application of the split leaves, once more my sores were healed completely.

O "East is East and West is West," and now the twain have met! In medicine, as in other fields, there are many things in common in East and West. Mutual benefit results from exchange. By combining discoveries and experiences, human life may yet be made better and happier.