GENTIANA LUTEA L. IN JUGOSLAVIA

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Since 1945 till 1959 several hundreds of members of research groups on medicinal plants - aromatic, honeyed and toxic, spices, - have studied the greater part of the mountains and valleys of the Oriental regions of Jugoslavia. The Institutes of Pharmacognosy and Research on Medicinal Plants organized their pharmaco-geographic and pharmacoehemie studies on a grand scale, since the research of all medicinal and similar plants are of importance for medicine, pharmacy, industry and exportation.

Here will be given only the study of the phytogeography of the Yellow Gentian or the Big Gentian (Gentiana lutea L.) in Jugoslavia.

It must be stated that the abundance of the Gentian is not the same in all the parts studied and that the richness of it is not constant. Thus in 1946—1947 we were able to note important quantities of the Gentian on the Zabljak plateau (ca. 1,500 m), below Durmitor (more than 2,500 m), at Stolovi (ca. 1,000 m), Baba (ca. 800 m) and Sinjajevina (ca. 2,000 m), whereas a few years later our groups found only rare examples of the Gentian in the same regions, owing to an irrational, careless and rapid exploitation.

In 1948 a great wealth in Gentian was observed in Decanske and other mountains in the neighbourhood of Pee and also in the Sar mountains (1,000—2,600 m); yet, a few years later very few were to be found.

Notable quantities of Gentian were seen by our groups in 1952 in Treskavica (ca. 1,900 m) in Bosnia.

Our groups also studied the medicinal flora of the high mountains (up to 2,750 m) in Macedonia in 1948, 1949, 1950, 1957 and 1958. They were unfortunately only able to state that the Gentian is far too greatly exploited and that in certain regions completely annihilated. In certain cases the Yugoslav herbists cross the Greek and Albanian frontiers to gather Gentian and vice versa. It is important to note that the frontier zone was up to 1956/57 very rich in Gentian - when access there was forbidden.

Enormous quantities of Gentian were destroyed by an irrational exploitation in the regions of Kopaonik (1,000—2,600 m) in Zlatibor (900—1,400 m) and the Tara (800—1,400 m) in Serbia.
This shows a merciless exploitation of such an important medicinal plant in practically all our regions. Since 1946 our groups have everywhere and on all occasions taught rational methods of harvesting the Yellow Gentian to foresters and forest-guardians and others in the mountains. The consumption of the Gentian root is enormous all over the globe, the drug is official in practically all the Pharmacopeas of the world. Careless pulling-up may cause a dangerous scarcity in the future, so that we asked for a partial or total protection of the Yellow Gentian in nature. For the same reasons we studied the possibilities and manner of its propagation in nature and its culture on a grand scale by division of „heads” having buds or, exceptionally, by the seeds of this plant. Acknowledging that it is fairly difficult to germinate the seeds, we recommend – all interested – for the moment a multiplication by division of „heads”, after pulling-out, i.e. in Autumn during humid weather.

In most of the mountains, not only in Jugoslavia, but also in other Balkan States, one must seriously fear for a dangerous scarcity of Gentian as its roots are very sought after in scientific and popular medicine as well as in distillaries which use it in large quantities for fabrication of widely known aperitives. Meanwhile, the Balkan Gentian is one of the most appreciated in international commerce. It derived its name from Gentius king of Illyria (West Jugoslavia) who was the first to use it in the second century A. D. (DIOSCORIDE, PLINE). Gentian has always been used from the time of the Greeks and Romans up to the present day. Among certain of our mountaineers it is a well known remedy against all sorts of fevers, so that already before the discovery of quinine it was the medicament used against Malaria.

The protection of Gentian in nature is of importance here for several reasons: it is a beautiful and long-living plant; spontaneous, a real ornament for our sub-alpine and alpine meadows; in Autumn in the dead season in the mountain villages, the harvesting of the Gentian root represents, for the poor families with many children, a sufficiently important revenue, money with which they buy wheat, salt, clothes and other necessities for the family. Therefore it becomes a social problem of great importance for the rural economy of our mountains.

Here also is to be seen the documentation on the rentability of the exploitation of Gentian and its pharmacomedical, social and economic importance for the country.

Harvesting of the Gentian is done in Autumn, after the first abundant rains, which generally take place in the second half of October. Before this it is very difficult as the earth is dry and the