

JOHANN BARTHOLOMÄUS TROMMSDORFF.

PHARMACIST, TEACHER, SCIENTIST.*

BY CURT P. WIMMER.

The year 1937 marks the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Johann Bartholomäus Trommsdorff. He was one of a most noted group of German pharmacists—a group known by their extremely conscientious careful work in chemistry and pharmacy. These scientists hold the esteem of the scientific world to-day. Among them, Johann B. Trommsdorff is the most noted and he is sometimes termed the Nestor of German scientific pharmacy. It seems fitting, therefore, that we review his life and his scientific work at this time.

He was born in Erfurt, Germany, in the year of 1770; the son of Dr. William Bernhard Trommsdorff, who was Professor of Medicine in the University of Erfurt and who at the same time owned a pharmacy in this city.

In the house of his father, who was not a pharmacist, but only the owner of a pharmacy—a scientific spirit prevailed and a tendency to regard the pharmacy of the day, then generally practiced as a trade, as a science. His father was very fortunate in securing as assistants, talented young men who were of outstanding genius and who later became heroes in the realm of science. Young Trommsdorff, having been born in this pharmaceutical atmosphere desired, early in life, to devote himself to the art and science of pharmacy.

The early death of his father caused the fourteen-year-old boy to enter the pharmacy of Dr. Sebastian Bucholz in Weimar, Germany. This pharmacy also distinguished itself by the active, scientific spirit which prevailed therein.

This teacher, Sebastian Bucholz, who had been a practicing pharmacist before he devoted himself to the study of medicine, was very much interested in chemistry. Although his extensive practice did not permit him to devote his time to chemistry, he gave his assistants an opportunity for a scientific education by opening to them his exquisite and selected library.

In his establishment, Trommsdorff acquired the reputation of a first-class pharmacist, and recognized the greatest and noblest of purposes of pharmacy, namely, to contribute to the well-being of the community and to assist suffering humanity.

In the year of 1792, he returned to Erfurt to take over the administration of his father's pharmacy. Three years later he was appointed Professor in Physics and Chemistry at the University of Erfurt. This same year he opened his own pharmaceutical institute, which he conducted for a period of thirty-three years with great success and through which he exerted the greatest possible influence upon the elevation of pharmacy to the status of a science. At this time he also published a "Journal of Pharmacy for Physicians and Pharmacists," an "Almanac for Analysts and Apothecaries," a "Review of the Progress in Science, Arts and Manufacture."

The reason for the foundation of his institute was, at first, to provide an opportunity for young men to become scientific pharmacists. Later on he enlarged the scope of his institute to become a sort of preparatory school for young men who desired to devote themselves to the study of medicine, the various arts and sciences and even business. There were no polytechnic schools in those days and even at the university very little time was given over to the study of science, especially the study of chemistry, which was completely neglected.

* Section on Historical Pharmacy, A. Ph. A., New York meeting, 1937.

In order to provide an institution where the subjects could be studied, Trommsdorff offered instruction in chemistry, various branches of pharmacy and physics. He provided an excellent garden containing thousands of rare plants for the study of botany. He engaged Professor Bernhardt to teach the subjects of zoology, mineralogy and crystallography. He obtained the services of Professor Weingärtener and Dr. Mensing in the teaching of mathematics. Special lecturers gave instruction in Latin, Greek, French, Italian and English. The term lasted one year, beginning immediately after Easter. No one was admitted to the institute during the term and an application for admittance had to be made no later than during the month of January of each year. Only students highly recommended were admitted. They lived in Trommsdorff's home, where he provided sleeping quarters but no food. It was Trommsdorff's intention to limit the enrollment and the first year of the existence of his institute he accepted only one student. Gradually the number increased but he never permitted the enrollment to exceed twenty.

In the year of 1829, Trommsdorff announced that he would close his institute. He now realized that a number of institutions had been organized, providing scientific education. Not only had the universities included the necessary subjects but in addition other teachers had founded institutes of similar kind. For example, Professor Schweiger had opened a pharmaceutical institute in Holland. Dr. Wackenroder opened one in Jena. Professor Liebig had founded a similar institute in Giessen.

Among the very numerous pharmaceutical researches carried out by Trommsdorff and his pupils, we might mention the analysis of guajac wood; of guarana; of cauliflower; of caraway; of valerian, in which he discovered valerianic acid; of cascarrilla; of coriander and many other barks and roots.

Other publications of Trommsdorff include the following: 1. "Systematic Handbook of Pharmacy"—four editions, 2. "Methods of Pharmaceutical and Chemical Experimentations"—three editions, 3. "Handbook of Pharmaceutical Materials"—three editions, 4. "New Pharmacopœia" corresponding to the present condition of *Materia Medica* and Pharmacology, 5. "Systematic Handbook of Chemistry"—eight volumes and many others.

Trommsdorff's death occurred on the 8th of March, 1837.

If we are to evaluate Trommsdorff's influence upon scientific pharmacy, we must recognize the fact that he was the first of a group of German scientists who insisted upon the idea that pharmacists must be scientific men; they must be well educated in order to be so considered.

Among pharmacists of his day, we may mention Christian Bucholz, Johann Schrader, Karl August Hoffman and Johann Goettling. All of these were true German characters, whose outstanding traits were truth, sincerity and frankness.

As teachers in various universities or of their own institutions, they combined unusual skill in experimentation, with clear and interesting presentation of their subjects. Among this group Trommsdorff was rated as the best. We, as Pharmacists—a hundred years after his death—must not fail to acknowledge our indebtedness to him who was instrumental in putting pharmacy on a scientific basis, and who never failed to proclaim the idea that pharmacy is a most important branch of the healing art.