

Pharmacy as a Subject of Religious Influence and Feeling*

Pharmacy in Retrospect, III

By *Dr. George Urdang and F. W. Nitardy*†

In early times illness was believed to be a divine punishment or—as in the case of Hiob—a divine temptation, and hence it was considered up to God to withdraw it again.

combined in practice as a single profession, and among the primitives even to-day, of course, the “medicine man” is still the potent combination of priest, apothecary and physician.

Long after the healing or care of body and soul had become separate professions, tradition of the old combination still shed its glory over pharmacy. The Christian Church considered the supply of remedies to



Fig. 1.—Della Robbia bas-relief, Santa Barnaba Church.

So it is not surprising to find in those times the rôle of apothecary, physician and priest

* A brief pharmaceutico-historical discussion of the subject from earliest times to about the 18th to 19th centuries illustrated with lantern slides of pharmaceutico-religious objects, mostly from the Squibb Ancient Pharmacy.

† Read by F. W. Nitardy before Section on History of Pharmacy, Atlanta meeting, August 23, 1939.

the poor as a part of its religious duties, and scientific pharmacy of the Middle Ages was widely practiced by the clergy. In the monasteries the practice of pharmacy was an important occupation, and it was here especially where medicinal and aromatic herbs were diligently cultivated, extracted and distilled. The monks copied the old

medical books, the works of Galen, of Plinius, Serapion, Mesue and especially of Dioscorides, annotated and amplified them on the basis of their own experience. They developed formulas and combinations which acquired great renown and some of which have been preserved and are used to this day.

The mundane pharmacists of the Middle

and preserve the curative and beneficial substances, but also to maintain and, if necessary, defend the ethics and ideals of their noble profession, ideals about which there is something truly divine.

With such a background, and the fervent piety of the plain people naturally reflected in the learned professions, of which pharmacy was one, it is not surprising to find the



Fig. 2.—Large wood carving, Mary with Jesus.

Ages took possession of the scientific pharmaceutical work of the Church as well as of the religious background of their profession. They were convinced that Providence had purposefully provided mankind with rich and varied natural sources of useful and healing agents. It was the task of pharmacy and its practitioners not only to develop this great gift of nature, to isolate, purify, perfect

close harmony of Christian and pharmaceutical ideals and ethics given expression through the fine arts and in the symbolism, decoration and naming of pharmacies and apothecaries' shops of previous centuries.

Each country and period of time had its deities to whom the origin of the healing arts was attributed and who at the same time were its patrons (Isis, Osiris and later

on Thoth in old Egypt; Bacchus, Apollo Ammon and Aesculapius in old Greece, and so on).

With Christianity, the saints and martyrs succeeded the pagan deities. Often we find the Virgin Mary looked upon as the protectress of pharmacy. In the 15th century, the Virgin Mary was the patroness of the combined guild of physicians and

Thus this work of art must have been dedicated by the pharmaceutical profession. (Fig. 1.)

In Central Europe, where the custom of naming the pharmacies after persons, animals, planets, etc., has continued to the present, many a pharmacy, especially in Catholic Bavaria, bears the name "Marien-apotheke" (Virgin Mary Pharmacy) and



Fig. 3.—Cosmas and Damien—page from Dutch Legend Book.

pharmacists in Florence. There are two sculptures, originating from the workshop of the famous artists, the brothers della Robbia, which have transmitted this fact to posterity. One, a medallion on the south gable of the church Orsamichele without any inscription, shows the Virgin with the Child surrounded by plants; the other, a bas-relief in the church Santa Barnaba, bears the inscription "Sub gubernatione artis aromatariorum."

has its front or its interior adorned with sculptures or pictures of the Virgin. Cloister pharmacies, especially, often have chosen this patroness and decorated their walls with statues or paintings portraying the Mother of Christ. The "Squibb Ancient Pharmacy" contains a large wood carving of Mary holding in her arms the dead Jesus, a carving which once was the holy sign and symbol of an old cloister pharmacy. (Fig. 2.)

Other saints, too, such as Jacobus the Senior, Nicholas of Bari, Lucas, Michael, Raphael, Rochus and finally Mary Magdalen, were more or less often adopted as patrons of individual pharmacies and pharmaceutical guilds. But these may be considered as mainly of local importance. Recognized in the whole Christian world as

highly regarded in the Christian world of that time that churches bearing their names were erected to honor them; statues, sculptures and pictures glorify them, and numerous pamphlets and legend-books from the 5th to the 19th centuries describe their life and martyrdom. Most of the works of art devoted to Cosmas and Damian show one

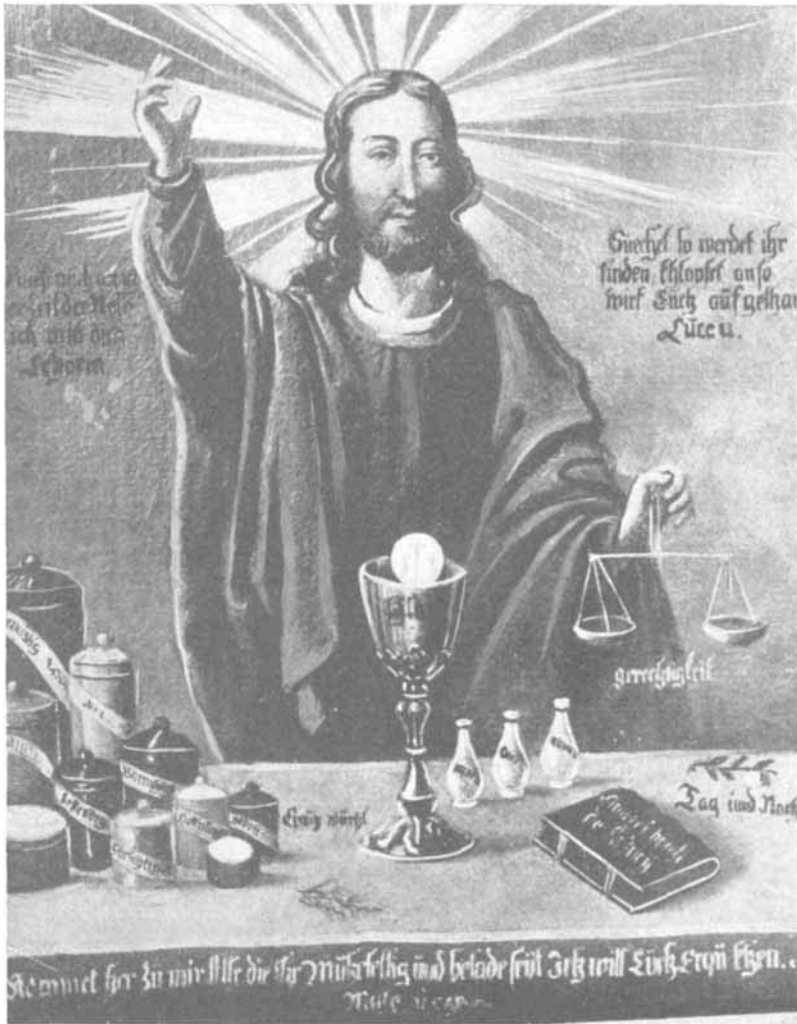


Fig. 4.—Oil painting—Christ as Apothecary.

the patrons of pharmacy, were the saints Cosmas and Damian; famous through the service, as pharmacist and physician, they gave so freely, without payment, to every one. The two brothers died in 303 as martyrs, during the persecution of the Christians by Emperor Diocletian.

These early victims of intolerance were so

brother as pharmacist and the other as physician, the former holding a drug or ointment container and a spatula and the latter a flask or urine glass, that old symbol of medicine. A page out of a 16th-century Dutch legend-book devoted to the martyrs, which we find in the "Squibb Ancient Pharmacy" (Fig. 3), shows a woodcut represent-

ing the brothers, and pictures them as described.

From the Middle Ages to the 18th century, the religious aspects of the pharmacy were by no means restricted to individual pharmacies or pharmacists. The Christian creed and the fear of God were in those times indispensable requirements for the practice of pharmacy in most countries of Christendom. We still find in the Royal Prussian and Electoral Brandenburgian Medical Edict of 1725, a copy of which is also to be found in the "Squibb Ancient Pharmacy," a definite stipulation that pharmacists must profess belief in the Christian Faith. There is scarcely one book in the long row of old herbals or other pharmaceutical works contained in the Squibb collection without a preface in which the author invokes God.

Thus, it is not astonishing that even the equipment of the pharmacies often bore witness to the piety of their owners. The Squibb collection possesses a number of jars, adorned with paintings of religious nature, and several mortars bearing the pious admonition to praise or to love God above all.

The most significant and symbolic of these expressions of the unity of Christian ideals and pharmaceutical ethics and practices may be found in the paintings representing Christ as Apothecary of the Soul. Of about seventy examples of paintings of this motif known to-day, the "Squibb Ancient Pharmacy" is the proud possessor of one of the most beautiful. It is a large 18th-century oil painting, German in origin, rich in color and most harmoniously composed. (Fig. 4.) The figure of the Saviour dominates the picture. His right hand is raised heaven-ward and in his left hand he holds the old-fashioned hand-dispensing balance. Light rays emanate from his head, giving a figure which is most impressive. Naturally all objects to be seen in that pious picture have their symbolic value. The word "Gerechtigkeit" (righteousness) underneath the hand-balance shows that the Saviour dis-

penses justice. The chalice bears the word "Glaube" (faith). The herb on the right side symbolizes with its designation "Tag und Nacht" the omnipresence of God; the herb in the foreground with its appellation "Kreutzwurtzl" (cross-root) suggests the crucifixion. The drug containers on the table carry inscriptions representing the more important Christian virtues, among them charity, constancy and hope. Quotations of Christ's word appearing to both sides



Fig. 5.—Gold and Silver Votive Shrine in form of a Pharmacy.

of the figure and at the bottom of the picture invite all to seek here the assistance needed. The deep meaning of this picture may be read on the book lying on the table in the foreground, "Himmelsbuch der Arzney" (Heaven's Book of Remedy). A drawing of identical composition and design may

be found in the Swiss National Museum; it is not known at this time if it represents a copy of the painting, the artist's drawing or possibly a sketch by an earlier artist which inspired a later one to reproduce it in oil.

Dr. Fritz Ferchl, a well-known German

tant series; typical of the latter are quotations from Christ's sayings taken from Luther's translation of the Bible, as is the case in this painting. On the other hand, the Host shown above the chalice is frequently a Catholic symbol.



Fig. 6.—Pair of cherubs representing a portion of the decorative elements of the Pharmacy.

authority in the field of pharmaceutical objects of art, has made a special study of such pictures. According to him, such representations were largely painted between the 16th and 19th centuries in the Germanic countries; they fall into Catholic and Protes-

Further evidence of public appreciation of the high ideals of professional pharmacy and its then pious character may be found in the "Squibb Ancient Pharmacy." The Catholic custom of making votive gifts, continued through centuries as a visible ex-

pression in return for divine grace and help in special cases of pain and disease, has led to the creation of a magnificent religio-pharmaceutical symbol which we may now admire in the Squibb collection: a tabernacle pharmacy embossed in silver and gold. (Fig. 5.)

This "pharmacy," once bequeathed as a thanksgiving to the real pharmacy of a Bavarian monastery, is a late baroque work of art, in all probability from the hands of an Augsburg gold- or silversmith of the middle of the 18th century. Especially in Augsburg around that time, this artistic craftsmanship had its second flowering. The drug drawers, pots and boxes are a sublime piece of work. In the upper arch we see openings used to hold candles, whose gentle light illumined this unique flower of religious pharmacy. Here Christ is not represented as pharmacist, but we find the crucifix in the foreground.

One of the most famous pictures painted

by Titian shows the incarnation of celestial and mundane love, separating and at the same time combining them. In a similar way, the Squibb collection adds to its witnesses of celestial love, also one which deals with the terrestrial variety. Two shields held by cherubs, a part of the beautiful and antique baroque fixtures of the "Squibb Ancient Pharmacy" (Fig. 6) (*a* and *b*) proclaim the sentence: "Amor nullis herbis medicabilis est" which means: Love cannot be cured by herbs. The herbs provided through divine love of man for the treatment of disease thus were not intended to assuage the pangs of terrestrial love. If the herbs cannot ease the pain of love, what can? Time, fate, God?

"Name it then as you will . . .
Feeling is all in all;
Name is but sound and fog
O'er clouding heaven's glow."

(Goethe, Faust, Part I.)

Book Reviews

Salben und Salben Grundlagen (Ointments and Ointment Bases). A guide for physicians and pharmacists. By DR. H. v. CZETISCH-LINDENWALD and DR. F. SCHMIDT-LABAUME; the former, an apothecary at the Biolaboratory of I. G. Dye Industry; the latter, lecturer and head of Skin Disease Clinic of the Hospital of Mannheim, with a contribution on the ointments for the protection of the skin of the workers in the industries by R. Jäger of the Institute for Colloidal Research of the Johan Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt a M. Published by Julius Springer, Berlin. Octavo, 240 pages, 36 illustrations. Price, R. M. 16.80 unbound; bound, R.M. 18.

The general arrangement begins with an historical résumé, followed by a classification of the ointments according to the constituents, animal fats, waxes, mineral oils; alcohols, emulsions, prescriptions; definitions for ointments and pastes. The special part treats of uses, bases, etc. with discussions as to what is desired in ointment preparations—are they to be absorbed, cooling or protective, how practical application is to be made; the aromatic and antiseptic values; the tests relative to color, keeping qualities, etc. The authors have given careful study to the various phases and then made experimental application. This part of the work can be commended, but it is somewhat limited with regard to the ointments used in this country. Vitamins in ointments have been

studied with regard to medicinal value, determination of medicinal ingredients, tar, sulfur, mercurials. The authors have cautioned the users of the book relative to dangerous products, for example, ointments containing radioactive substances. This discussion is very helpful and is evidently an original presentation. Throughout the authors have sought to give practical information. The volume will be a valuable addition to the libraries of medical, pharmacy and veterinary schools. The last chapter is devoted to methods of application.—E. G. EBERLE.

Fundamentals of Pharmacy, by WALTER H. BLOME, Wayne University College of Pharmacy, Detroit, Mich., and CHARLES H. STOCKING, University of Michigan, College of Pharmacy, Ann Arbor, Mich. with a chapter on Hospital Pharmacy by EDWARD C. WATTS, University of Michigan Hospital, Ann Arbor, Mich. Octavo, 364 pages; 157 illustrations. Price, cloth, \$4.50. Publishers, Lea and Febiger Philadelphia.

The volume is dedicated to Alviso Burdette Stevens, councilor, teacher, co-worker and friend. The authors state "That the book has been written to fill the growing need for a text that should treat fundamentals of Pharmacy in concise form and yet be complete enough to supply the essential information of the art of preparing, standardizing and preserving drugs and medicines." They have made use of their experiences and drawn upon the historical knowledge during years of Association mem-