

## HISTORY OF THE APOTHECARY SHOP: A BIBLIOGRAPHY.\*

BY EDWARD KREMERS.

## No. 4. THE APOTHECARY SHOP OF CASTLE ISSOGNE.

In like manner as one of the mural paintings of the *Casa dei Vettii* affords us a glimpse into the activities of a Roman precursor to the modern apothecary as he plied his trade at the very beginning of the Christian era, so a mural painting of Castle Issogne affords a glimpse into the "bottega"<sup>1</sup> of the "confectionarius" or "stationarius," *i. e.*, the apothecary of the Italian *quattrocento*, the early renaissance. This glimpse is all the more interesting and valuable because it takes us back to the time shortly after Emperor Frederick II had announced his famous "edict of 1224," whereby pharmacy was made a distinct profession. The Italian apothecary thus became the prototype for the representative of the countries north of the Alps. It was in Italy that the better class of early apothecaries were educated. It was from Italy, whose cities on the Adriatic and Mediterranean maintained direct commercial connection with the Orient, that the ultramontane countries obtained not only the costly spices and aromatics, but some of the most highly cherished galenical preparations, notably the theriac.

The *Castello d'Issogne* lies in the *Valle d'Aosta* on the right shore of the Dora or Doire, which has its two-fold origin on St. Bernhard and Mont Blanc, respectively, and which empties into the river Po below Turin. The nearest community is the *borgo di Verres*, a small market town. Not far away is the Castle Challant to the owners of which Castle Issogne also belonged. The latter now belongs to Vittorio Avando, a collector of antiquities.

The builder of Issogne was Giorgio di Challant. The date of his birth is unknown. In 1485 he was a student of law. Later he occupied several clerical positions. He died as governor of the Aorto Valley, Dec. 30, 1509. The castle was built by him about the year 1490.

The *Castello* was constructed as a palace rather than as a fortified castle, being without wall, moat and other devices of defense. The building as such, as well as its interior arrangement and decorations, represents the transition stage between the rigid Gothic and the more exuberant renaissance style. For a description of the building and its interior, the reader is referred to the works of Forrer<sup>2</sup> and of Avando and Giacosa<sup>3</sup>—the former being based on the latter—to which the writer is indebted for description as well as photographic reproduction of the mural painting of the apothecary shop.

The frescoes of special interest are found in the arched wall space of the cloister on the ground floor of the castle above the wood panels. The lower portion of each painting is disfigured with names of visitors. The frescoes represent (1) a grocery store; (2) an apothecary shop; (3) a tailor's shop and booth for the sale of cloth; (4) a market scene; and (5) a scene in a military barracks.

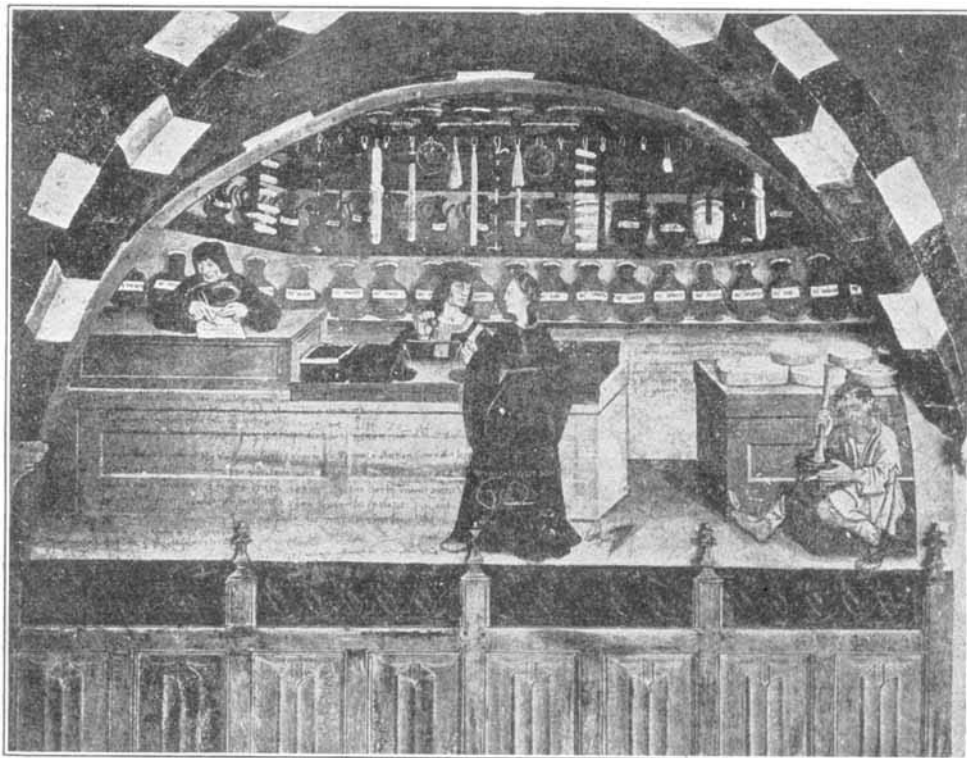
\* Section on Historical Pharmacy, A. Ph. A., Cleveland meeting, 1922.

<sup>1</sup> Italian for *boutique*, both Romance corruptions of the Lat. *apotheca*, the Greek *apotheke*.

<sup>2</sup> R. Forrer, "Spaetgothische Wohnraeume und Wandmalereien aus Schloss Issogne." Mit 12 Lichtdrucktafeln. Verlag von Fritz Schliesier in Strassburg i. E., 1896.

<sup>3</sup> Vittorio Avando Giuseppe Giacosa, "Notizie storiche intorno la famiglia di Challant." (with 20 photographic reproductions.) Torino, Tip. Lect. Camilla E. Bortoloro.

The description of the apothecary shop is herewith given, both in the original of Forrer and a rather literal translation by the writer.



The Apothecary Shop of Castle Issogne.

Whether the following comment on Forrer's description is called for the reader may judge for himself.

"Hinter dem erhöhten Pulte links sitzt der Arzt und rechnet.

Im Mittelalter war der Arzt zugleich auch Apotheker, und es kann uns seine Anwesenheit daher hier nicht befremden. Der weite Mantel und die tief die Ohren bedeckende Muetze sind sein charakteristisches, auch in den Miniaturen des XV und in den Holzschnitten des XVI Jahrhunderts immer wiederkehrendes Costuem. Rechts von ihm waegt der Provisor einer eben hinzugetretenen Dame das verlangte Medicament oder die gewünschte Spezerei vor. Schachteln, welche neben ihm auf dem Tische stehen, enthalten irgendwelche besonders oft verlangte Dinge fuer Mund und Magen. Rechts ist ein alter Mann mit zerlumptem Gewande beschaeftigt, in einem Moerser mit maechtigem Stoessel etwas Hartes zu zerkleinern.

Behind the raised desk sits a physician<sup>1</sup> who is figuring.

During the middle ages the physician was also apothecary, hence his presence in the apothecary shop is to be expected. The flowing robe with the cap that covers the ears are his characteristic costume, such as may repeatedly be seen in miniatures of the fifteenth century also in wood cuts of the sixteenth century. To the right of the physician the assistant weighs out a medicament or spice for the lady who has just stepped into the booth. The boxes which rest on the counter next to the assistant contain such articles as are more frequently demanded for mouth and stomach. To the right an old man in ragged garb is occupied with comminuting something hard in a mortar with a mighty pestle.

Laengs der Rueckwand ruhen auf starken Holzgestellen zahlreiche Apothekergefasse mit gothischen Inschriftzeddeln, welche uns ueber den Inhalt Aufschluss geben. Die untere Reihe enthaelt allerlei wohlthaetige Waesser, darunter *aq melisse* und *aq absinctis* noch heute nicht vergessen sind. Die oberen Regale zeigen bemalte Toepfe und Kannen verschiedensten Inhaltes.

Von der Gewoelbedecke herab haengen Dinge, die zum Theil nur schwer bestimmbar sind, und Andere, die wir heute bei einem Apotheker nicht mehr suchen: Lange Kerzen, runde verzierte Kuchen, Zuckerbrode u. dgl. m. Damit harmonirt der Inhalt der auf dem schameln Pulte rechts ausgestellten Schachteln mit Datteln und candirten Fruechten, wie sie das Mittelalter als Leckerbissen liebte, und wie sie noch heute eine Specialitaet der itelienischen Zuckerbaecker bilden. Die runden und ovalen Holzschachteln sind mit zierlich ausgezacktem Papier ausgelegt, ganz wie noch heute die aus Italien kommenden Dosen mit candirten Suedfruechten innen ausgestattet sind!

Auf den obersten Regalen der Hinterwand ruhen zahlreiche geschlossene Schachteln, unter deren Deckeln dasselbe ausgeschnittene Papier hervorlugt, und die einen gleichen Inhalt vermuthen lassen. Man sieht, die Apotheken jener Zeit standen in Bezug auf die Vielgestaltigkeit der Dinge, an denen sie was verdienen wollten, unseren heutigen nicht nach.

Dass sie ebenso theuer wie die heutigen waren, moechte man beinahe aus der ansehnlichen Groesse des Geldstueckes schliessen, das die Kaeuferin dem Provisor mit erstauntem Gesicht entgegegstreckt.

1. Forrer expresses the opinion that the person who is writing or "figuring" is a physician and gives his reason for this view. In this connection, however, two things should be remembered. First, that, in accordance with the edict of Frederick II, all commercial relation between the physician and the newly created apothecary was strictly forbidden. It is possibly because of this regulation that Schelenz\* regards him as the master apothecary or "chef" and the person with the balance as the "Provisor," *i. e.*, the first assistant or prescriptionist. To what extent the edict of Frederick II was enforced in the numerous petty states of what we now call Italy, does not appear to be known. Moreover, what is commonly referred to as the Edict of 1224 is said by historians to be a collection of edicts and ordinances issued over a long period. It is, therefore, an open question, not only whether the particular edict forbidding physician and apothecary to make common cause was in force, but also whether it is, in reality, as old as sometimes assumed. After all, therefore, Forrer may be correct in his assumption.

In the rear, on heavy shelving, are numerous pharmaceutical containers, the gothic labels of which reveal their content. On the lower shelf<sup>2</sup> are found all sorts of medicinal waters, such as *aga melisse* and *aga absinctis* which are known even to-day. The upper shelves reveal painted pots and cans with a variety of contents.

From the arched ceiling there are suspended a number of articles only a few of which can be identified with difficulty;<sup>3</sup> also others that we no longer seek in an apothecary shop, such as long candles, round decorated cakes, sugared bread, etc. In harmony with these are the contents of boxes:<sup>4</sup> dates and candied fruits exhibited on the small desk to the right. These were much liked as delicacies during the middle ages and are to-day a specialty of Italian confectioners. The round and oval wooden boxes are lined with white paper with fringed borders, like the boxes imported at the present time from Italy, with candied, semitropical fruits.

On the highest shelves of the rear wall are numerous closed boxes from under the covers of which the same kind of fringed paper projects and which presumably contain the same delicacies. It becomes apparent that the apothecary shops of that period did not take a back seat to our own with regard to the multiplicity of objects with which they wanted to make a living.

That they were as high priced as those of to-day may possibly be inferred from the appreciable size of the coin which the purchaser, with a surprised expression, offers to the assistant.

\* "Geschichte der Pharmacie," p. 382.

Secondly, attention should be directed to the rule in certain cities compelling the physician to write his prescription in a book kept for this purpose in the apothecary shop. It is possibly because of this rule that one sees the physician in so many pictures of apothecary shops writing prescriptions. Thus while Forrer's interpretation of the person behind the writing desk as physician may be correct, his interpretation regarding the physician as owner of the shop may nevertheless be wrong.

2. The labels of the containers on the lower shelf, from left to right, read as follows:

- |                                    |                           |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. <i>Aqboragii</i>                | = <i>Aqua Boragii</i>     |
| 2. <i>Aq rosar</i>                 | = <i>Aqua rosarum</i>     |
| 3. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> plata</i>     | =                         |
| 4. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> violar</i>    | = <i>Aqua violarum</i>    |
| 5. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> bugolose</i>  | =                         |
| 6. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> melise</i>    | = <i>Aqua Melissae</i>    |
| 7. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> s----</i>     | =                         |
| 8. <i>----bsinci</i>               | = <i>Aqua absinthii</i>   |
| 9. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> zute</i>      | =                         |
| 10. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> lihazii</i>  |                           |
| 11. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> cunozie</i>  |                           |
| 12. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> betonice</i> | = <i>Aqua Betonicae</i>   |
| 13. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> fenicul</i>  | = <i>Aqua foeniculi</i>   |
| 14. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> berberic</i> | = <i>Aqua berberis(?)</i> |
| 15. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> vite</i>     | = <i>Aqua vite</i>        |
| 16. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup> valeria</i>  | = <i>Aqua valerianae</i>  |
| 17. <i>Aq<sup>o</sup></i>          |                           |

It is very apparent from the above list that the aromatic waters, these precursors to the volatile oils, had begun to play their important rôle as representing the quintessence of the drugs from which they were distilled.

The labels on the containers in the upper row are even more difficult to decipher. Again from left to right, the following may be read:

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|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <i>O. R</i>      | =                           |
| 2. <i>C</i>         | = <i>Confectio</i>          |
| 3. <i>O.</i>        | =                           |
| 4. <i>Acite</i>     | = <i>Acetum</i>             |
| 5. <i>Aqa S</i>     | = <i>Aqua S</i>             |
| 6. <i>----sen</i>   | =                           |
| 7. <i>O-All</i>     | =                           |
| 8. <i>O</i>         | =                           |
| 9. <i>----Ric</i>   | =                           |
| 10. <i>C Rosata</i> | = <i>Confectio rosata</i>   |
| 11. <i>C. Olive</i> | = <i>Confectio olivæ</i>    |
| 12. <i>C. Rosr.</i> | = <i>Confectio rosarum.</i> |
| 13. <i>C. pomic</i> | =                           |

The number of confections on the upper shelf as well as the boxes with (presumably) candied fruit on the counter would seem in harmony with the designation *confectionarius*, by which name the Italian apothecary of the early renaissance was known, were it not for the fact that the term was used to designate other makers than those of candied fruit as well.

No claim is made, in each instance, for the correctness of the labels where the attempt has been made to decipher them with a magnifying glass. It is to be hoped that some Italian apothecary may some day prepare a list of titles from the originals, if this has not already been done.

3. Concerning the articles suspended from the ceiling, Schelenz regards them as "probably" being "cakes of wax, roots strung on strings, queer drugs and wax candles." Without an actual inventory of an Italian apothecary shop of this period, it may be useless to speculate as to who is more likely correct, Forrer or Schelenz.

4. Of the "Spanschachteln," Schelenz† states that up to the middle of the 19th century, they were used almost exclusively for packing "confects, dry medications and ointments."

Of further interest is the fresco representing a market scene with two booths in the background. Both of these booths open upon the market, the entire front being removed during business hours.

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### THE MODERN TOWER OF BABEL.\*

BY ROBERT S. LEHMAN.

Some 6000 years ago, sacred history tells us, the inhabitants of the then-known world, who lived in the fertile valley of Mesopotamia, began the erection of a monumental temple of great height in honor of the pagan god Baal. This was known as the Tower of Babel.

As they were progressing with their task, the great Jehovah, who would brook no other gods beside himself, caused these misguided workers to be stricken with a malady, which rendered them unable to understand each other's language; in other words, he created a confusion of tongues.

At the present time, a similar transition is in progress, but of a reversed order. In other words, in the modern Tower of Babel, which is our wonderful City of New York, folk of all tongues flock together and are gradually being converted into a people speaking a common language, which we trust and hope will be raised in praise and reverence of the great Jehovah.

That this process is a laborious and slow one, goes without saying, for many of those who have come from foreign lands to establish a new home on our shores have passed the age when the elasticity of their intellect will permit them to acquire the language of their adopted country. So, naturally, they flock together in the sections where the people of their race and tongue congregate and sometimes even fear to venture outside of the confines of their district.

The youthful members of these colonies are more fortunately situated, for thanks to our excellent public school system, they soon acquire the English language, and, I am sorry to say, often forget or ignore the tongue of their forefathers.

Those of middle age, who are obliged to be the bread-winners of the older and younger members of their families, are forced to learn the common language, as a matter of sheer necessity, as otherwise they would soon be submerged in the relentless struggle for their daily bread.

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† "Geschichte der Pharmacie," p. 382.

\* Read before New York Branch, A. Ph. A., January meeting, 1923.