

THE APOTHECARY, A LITERARY STUDY

BY EDWARD KREMERS.

II. FRA ANGELICO, an Italian Colleague.

Fra Angelico is not a priest who delivers tirades against the substitution practices of the apothecaries,* but an apothecary himself. Neither is he the apothecary of a monastery of the renaissance, but a modern lay representative of his calling. Fra Angelico is the nickname of Signor Angelo, who has a monopoly on everything pharmaceutical in a little God forsaken village up in the mountains on the border of the Sabine and "Albanian" hills, not distant from Rome.

It is in his shop where toward evening the gentry of the village meets: the priest, the schoolmaster, the surgeon, the tax commissioner and several "benestanti" who do not hold office but whose faces reflect the abundant harvest of olives and grapes of the previous season. Not only is the apothecary shop the place of rendezvous of this select circle, but the apothecary himself is its principal figure. No one dares contradict him, especially if, before beginning a longer speech, he brushes his large silver spectacles on his coat sleeves and begins thus: "*Ecco, signori miei, this is the way it is.*"

At the time he is introduced to the literary public he is somewhat advanced in years, *vis.*, fifty-five years of age and his bald head is surrounded by a circle of short, black hair, hence the nickname given to him by his fellow citizens.

Only twice Signor Angelo has been out of his nest in the mountains. Both times he was in Rome, which to him is the world. Hence he talks positively about anything and everything. His other information has been drawn from a few books that have been picked up in a haphazard way and which constitute his library. However, Signor Angelo is something more than an apothecary and the head of the village gentry, he is a poet. Neither is he a man of leisure who dashes off a bit of verse on a special occasion for the sake of entertainment. He is a poet by the grace of God, for he writes because he cannot do otherwise. When of an evening he steps to the window and sees the moon rise over the ragged hills and the firefly flitting in his garden, the situation becomes irresistible and he dashes off sonnet after sonnet. He is even an honorary member of the Arcadia, a circle of poets in Rome.

Yet Fra Angelico is not the hero of a story, he is but its raconteur. The hero is Barbarossa¹ and the heroine is Erminia with whom everyone, including our apothecary has been in love one time or other. This, however, was some years ago when Signor Angelo was younger and before the tragic end occurred. Indeed, our faithful apothecary is still in love with her and it is really her memory that inspires him to write sonnets.

It was after a stay in Rome, that Paul Heyse was overcome with an insatiable desire for solitude. So he went into the Sabine hills and found this forlorn village where he had intended to stop for a day. Yet he remained a fortnight. He avoided the two inns where the German painters were quartered, and found a

* *Comp. Abraham a Santa Clara, Gargantua and Garzoni.*

¹ Barbarossa, a "Novelle" by Paul Heyse. Vol. 5, p. 126 of his "*Gesammelte Werke.*" Verlag von Wilhelm Hertz, Berlin, 1878.

hospitable roof in the apothecary shop. The apothecary had the greatest patience with Heyse's poor command of the Italian language, but he abused the author's patience by reading two dozen sonnets at a sitting. Heyse was generous enough to listen patiently and not to reveal to his host that he was a writer by profession.

Thus matters took their course until one day the author asked his host why he had not married. With some reluctance the apothecary enters upon the theme. He admits that he once was in love with a girl who possessed all the charms which Apollines found in a hundred contemporary women when he painted his Venus. She was a very poor girl, yet she rejected him as she did all suitors, until one day there came a foreigner, a Swedish general.

"*Ecco, amico mio*, this is the way it was," he begins his story one evening about nine o'clock. With a sigh he had trimmed the lamp, leaned back in his chair behind the counter, half closed his eyes and placed his hands into the pockets of his jacket. The place in front of the shop was deserted. The splashing of the fountain was the only noise audible from without and the snoring of the apprentice who slept in the adjoining chamber, from within. After a long pause he began as was his custom, "*Ecco, amico mio*."

But the story of Erminia and her lovers has no particular pharmaceutical elements though told by an apothecary. However, it is told in the vivacious and fascinating style of Paul Heyse and is well worth reading. Finally, it may be of interest to note that the same author has at least twice described an apothecary in some detail: this Italian representative of an out of the way place (1869) and a German representative of a small residential town that is just being forced to awaken from its long sleep of several centuries of self contentment.

MRS. EUGENE G. EBERLE.

It is with sincere sorrow that we record the death on February 9, 1919, of Mrs. Eugene G. Eberle, wife of the Editor of the JOURNAL. Mrs. Eberle was of Texas birth, and came with Mr. Eberle to Philadelphia a few years ago when the JOURNAL office was moved to this city.

Mrs. Eberle possessed a peculiarly beautiful and self-sacrificing nature, the sort of woman who seemed to embody in concrete form the highest ideals of a true wife and mother. She added to the usual charm of the Southern gentlewoman a rare graciousness of manner which endeared her to every one she met—a truly lovely woman and a worthy helpmate of her husband.

She leaves two daughters, Mrs. Briggs and Mrs. Gibbs, and two sons, Ambrose Ryan and Joseph Ryan. Interment was at Honey Grove, Texas, the place of her birth. Our sympathy goes out to Mr. Eberle and his family in their sad bereavement.

JOSEPH W. ENGLAND.